Campione! Volume 12

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かりそめの聖夜

カンピオーネ！ Campione XII

丈月城

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草薙護堂は神殺しである。

草薙護堂は心労を重ねていた。七人目の魔王である護堂を監視するために派遣されてきた、イタリアの魔術師・エリカやリリアナからの視線は厳しく、日本の正史編纂委員会からの遣い、媛巫女・祐理は護堂を恐れている。不本意ながらも続いてきた日常を過ごす護堂だったが、なぜか彼には「今」の状況にぬぐえない違和感があって…!?

丈月 城

Illustration
シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

Campione XII

かりそめの聖夜

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「あなたでしたか！」

護堂は驚いた。

視線の先にいるのは旧知の人物だったのだ。

茫々たる広野に端然と座し、

膝に乗せた台形の琴を奏でるのは

あでやかな十二単に身をつつむ媛。

美しく長い髪は亜麻色で、

冴えわたる瞳は玻璃の色。

幾度か幽世で邂逅した、玻璃の媛であった。

エリカ
恵那
護堂
リアナ
祐理

丈月 城

Illustration

シコルスキー

カンピオーネ！

かりそめの聖夜

Campione XII

あとがき

Prologue

Today, Kusanagi Godou got up at 6 A.M. in the morning.

Already accustomed since childhood to a routine of "early to bed, early to rise," getting out of bed this early was no particular challenge.

Seeing as the day was the fifteenth, December was already halfway through and the chilly morning air was quite unbearable. Nevertheless, Godou mustered his spirit to ignore the cold and threw open the blankets.

Next was a contest of speed. Godou hastily changed and got dressed.

Fastening his jogging training wear, he slid his door open to enter the hallway.

His little sister Shizuka should still be asleep in the adjacent room. Taking care to avoid making noise, Godou made his way to the bathroom downstairs to freshen up and make himself presentable. Then he went to the kitchen for a glass of water before heading to the entrance.

After putting on his running shoes, Godou took off.

The surroundings were still very dark because the sun rose quite late this time of the year. Even so, the sky would brighten up during his daily jogging routine.

Looking up at the sky, very few clouds could be seen. Today was apparently going to be a comfortable clear winter day.

"Well, let's get started."

After sufficient stretching, Godou muttered to himself, his breath white against the cold winter air.

Starting off with a slow jog, he gradually picked up the pace.

Originally an athlete and presently still leading a life requiring physical exertion, Godou had never made an explicit decision to train his stamina. Oh well, this was purely explained by his disposition towards an active lifestyle.

Thus, he went jogging today as usual, adhering to his routine as if were his daily homework.

Godou decided on a suitable path as he jogged. After his jogging took him beyond the shopping street at Area 3 of Nezu, he would head towards Kototoi Bridge. Continuing further all the way to Ueno Park might not be a bad idea either.

Seeing as it was a midwinter morning, the weather was naturally very cold. But regardless, the body warmed up rapidly anyway.

For Godou who was already well accustomed to this, the icy and refreshing air felt rather comfortable instead.

"Running every morning sure can put a person in a good mood. There is the fresh air and no people around to get in my way."

After muttering to himself, Godou went “Huh?” with uncertainty.

Come to think of it, his recent jogging had all taken place during night or dusk. Because he needed to complete a daily task that had evolved into something like routine business, time had to be taken out of his mornings...

“But today, I went jogging like this...”

Godou continued running with a brisk tempo, deciding to ignore this doubt. If he could not recall what it was, then it probably was not very important in the first place.

The Kusanagi residence was an ancient wooden house and former second-hand bookstore.

Having returned home, Godou was passing by the kitchen when he discovered his sister.

“Yo.”

“You're supposed to say good morning, Onii-chan.”

“We've been siblings for more than a decade, so this is good enough.”

This was Godou's first conversation with his little sister this morning, taking place as she stood wide awake before the gas stove, preparing the miso soup.

Today was Shizuka's turn for cooking duties. The little sister, a third year middle schooler who attended Jounan Academy together with Godou, was currently tasting the miso soup using a small dish. She made a suffering expression.

"Hmm..."

"It tastes bad?"

"Of course not. Simply dissolving miso paste in boiling water is enough to achieve this taste. But compared to what Grandpa makes, it is rather bad."

"From the fact that he prepares the soup stock by simmering dried bonito fish, you can already tell how particular he is about paying attention to details."

Right now, Shizuka was using miso stock manufactured by a major brand.

On the other hand, Grandpa Kusanagi Ichirou, the one who usually took on all cooking duties, was a proponent of white miso. Furthermore, he frequently used hand-made miso of exquisite quality that was sent by a "friendly lady" who resided in Shinshuu or somewhere like that.

The difference in taste was inevitable.

Even with that knowledge, Godou and Shizuka still used manufactured soup stock.

It was far more convenient. After all, the simmering required to prepare the soup stock would take too much trouble.

"All due to diligence, that's Grandpa for you. Completely different from us."

"Completely agreed, for once. But there also exist people who feel quite troubled because of it."

The siblings in the kitchen nodded at each other.

The grandfather in question was currently away on a long-term trip. Godou had heard that he apparently had a friend in Bhutan (referring to the country sandwiched between India and China, of course) who helped him in the past but was now hospitalized.

"I'm going to visit for a bit. While I'm there, over at my friend's, I'll take the opportunity to tour the surrounding region. I guess I'll probably spend New Year there too. Please take good care of the house while I am gone."

That was what he said the day before he set off.

And just like that he abruptly left, so fleet of foot that no one would expect he was over seventy years old.

But conversely, this could be taken as a showcase of Kusanagi Ichirou's true personality.

"Since he mentioned touring the surrounding region, he probably won't be limiting his visit to just the one country of Bhutan, right?"

"Naturally. After all it's Grandpa we're talking about."

"Although he said he's going over to his friend's... It can't be limited to that alone, right?"

"...Naturally. After all, it's Grandpa we're talking about."

Shizuka stated her doubts. On his second time answering, Godou's tone of voice weighed a little heavier.

Not limited to a male friend. A female friend, or even female relationships of a more intimate nature.

"I really do like Grandpa, but I've always felt that his female relationships have always been a sore sight."

"Well, I think so too."

"Good, then please pay attention in the future."

"What do you mean?"

"Like getting involved with strange women. Although you haven't gotten used to getting along with girls yet, Onii-chan, you've started crossing paths with girls without noticing. And quite frequently too."

"Shizuka... Don't talk as if Grandpa and I were of the same type ."

Eyes looking off to the distance, Godou started to complain.

"Although this really isn't anything worth bragging about, I have never talked to any girl for a lengthy amount of time apart from you. Oh, I guess there is Tokunaga Asuka, but she's a bit different from being a girl."

"Very good, Onii-chan. Just continue to work hard and maintain the status quo."

In response to Godou's indolent grumbling, Shizuka looked quite pleased for some reason.

"If you're going to be that smug, feel free to back it up with some support."

“Fine, I'm not going to remain silent about the extremely rude thing you said about Asuka-chan.”

Seeing his sister’s smug smile, Godou scratched his head.

He had apparently said something wrong without noticing. Anyway, Asuka was a childhood friend since before kindergarten. Dismissing the matter as "whatever," Godou happened to glance at the calendar by chance.

“Say, Christmas is coming up soon.”

“Now what are you talking about? It’s already December. Namely, the most lonely month for single guys and girls out of the entire year.”

Shizuka said this with a cheerful tone.

“Onii-chan, are you going spend Christmas Eve at home again? Anyways, mom won’t be back so we can share the cake just between the two of us. Oh! Or how about we get Asuka-chan and Sakura-chan and throw together a small party?”

“Hmm... Sorry, but let me hold off answering for a little while..”

“Eh? Impossible! You have someone else with whom to spend Christmas Eve together?!”

“No, it’s not like that. For some reason I feel like there's an important event coming up, but just what is it?

Head cocked to one side, Godou continued to stare at the calendar in puzzlement.

The latter half of December. Approximately on the 24th or 25th. There was apparently something prearranged for sure—

Chapter 1 - Kusanagi Godou is a Campione...?

Part 1

It feels like something was going to happen around Christmas.

However, he couldn't clearly remember what it was. Whatever it was supposed to be was now lost from his memory. He couldn't help but get a bad feeling from all of this.

"But, no matter how hard I try to remember I still can't recall it. "

It was currently morning. Godou was muttering to himself as he sat in the classroom before homeroom started.

Godou goes to Jounan Academy where he is currently in year one class five. The seat that he was sitting in was the one that he routinely sits in every day.

"Hey, Kusanagi, you're pretty early today."

The one to greet Godou was Nanami, a classmate of his.

"I'm always here around this time, aren't I?"

"Really? I always felt that you got here around five minutes before class started... Anyhow, you should take a look outside."

It was twenty minutes before homeroom would start in the room they were currently in.

"Don't you think the sky is just beautiful today?"

"I'm sure today's clear winter skies would make anyone feel comfortable, but, Nanami... do you have a fever or something??"

"Hey hey, what are you saying all of a sudden?"

"That's my line. You getting poetic about the sky? Come on. If you like I'll take you to the nurse's office."

Godou's tone was relatively serious. About 60% of it was meant to be a joke, but the remaining 40% was genuine worry.

Nanami was the leader of the three idiots. But no matter how you looked at it, it was still strange. Just what the heck had happened to him?

"Whew, you sure are stupid."

Nanami put on a cartoon villain's sinister smile.

"I don't know why I'm so calm lately. I feel like I can tolerate anything, no matter how unreasonable. It's as if my heart is at peace like the saying goes, calm as a lake."

"You really are something else."

As Godou stared at him in wonder, two more boys were heading their way.

“Yo. Doesn't the peace and quiet today just make you content? I wholeheartedly pray for all wars and conflicts to disappear from this world.”

“Ahh, look how beautiful the world is.”

Speaking of which, these two gently smiling boys that had just arrived were also Godou’s friends.

These were the remaining two that made up the three idiots, Sorimachi and Takagi. Their lips displayed tender smiles and their gaze was incomparably gentle.

“Even you guys are acting like this? You're so weird. Aren't all three of you too calm recently?”

Godou recalled a previous conversation with the three idiots.

“Didn’t you guys say that 'Christmas is an event for the mass media, subverted by the romance capitalism, to manipulate the ignorant masses to become festive and merry. We ourselves are trying to counteract that tendency as good as we can’. Whatever happened to that?”

“Well, yeah. But that's fine already."

"Certainly, this partying and merrymaking is too much for the eyes."

"But it feels like the storm that raged around us has calmed down lately. It's really strange, we can even pleasantly think of the people that are living their satisfied real lives."

The three idiots reminded him of enlightened saints.

“There was a storm around us?”

“I can’t remember what it exactly was now, but Kusanagi, I also think so.”

Takagi suddenly stretched out his arms and hugged Godou.

“Right now we can tell you, Kusanagi. Without a doubt you are our comrade, a partner walking down the same way.”

“What a coincidence. Actually, I feel the same.”

“Yeah, right now I can also accept Kusanagi as our comrade.”

Even Sorimachi and Nanami were saying it with enthusiasm. Godou was bewildered.

“What in the world are you guys saying? Haven’t we always been friends?”

“Comrade and friend are not the same. Even if we are of a different kind, we can still become friends. However, only those of the same kind who share blood and soul can become comrades, we need to be bonded in our hearts...”

Nanami pretended like he knew what he was saying.

Just then a silver haired girl entered the classroom. She was not of Japanese descent.

The slim student was wearing the uniform of Jounan Academy. Her slender, lovely, and fairy-like presence added up to a totally unique atmosphere. Her beautiful silver hair was tied into a pony tail.

Her name was Liliana Kranjcar. She was an exchange student from Italy.

“Liliana-san, good morning!”

“Would you like to eat lunch with us today?”

The girls within the class immediately called out to her. She was indeed a very popular person.

While giving them a calm smile, Liliana sat down at her seat. It was about four rows in front of Godou's, so they were a bit apart. At that moment, Godou's and Liliana’s eyes met.

The silver-haired, Eastern European beauty did a slight, Japanese bow towards Godou. That was all.

She did not come to greet him, nor did she come over and strike up a conversation. She seemed vigilant of him as always. It was fair to say that Godou and the two most popular girls of the class had a delicate relationship. They were not estranged by any means , but they couldn't quite get friendly either.

By the time the other popular girl showed up, the second period was over.

“Ah, Erica-san!”

“Thank goodness, I thought you wouldn't come anymore.”

Between the second and third period there was a brief break.

Erica Blandelli, who had just arrived, was a beauty. Her fluttering, reddish-blonde hair gave the exchange student from Milan an air of royalty as she walked into the classroom.

“Sorry about that, I was caught up in various problems.”

Erica's reply was accompanied by a refined smile.

Even though all the girls were around the same age, Erica’s grace and composure were on a different level.

By the way, with the reasoning she 'had received education equal to a university degree back in Italy' she had been allowed to commute on flextime. Such an excuse was just too ridiculous.

She had probably used a kind of hypnosis magic to push it through.

Godou's and Erica's eyes met. The blonde Italian beauty flashed a gorgeous smile, and made a graceful bow. Like a beautiful knight before a duel.

That was all. She didn't call out to greet him, nor did she come over and strike up a conversation

Erica's seat was the one in front of Liliana's. It was a bit apart from his. He didn't have any reason to talk to them either, so he shrugged again.

He did feel that it wouldn't be bad to get closer to them.

However, he had no idea how to accomplish that.

Part 2

On this day, Godou headed directly home after school. He had already made plans in advance.

In fact, December 3 was his sister Shizuka's birthday. Furthermore, he had agreed to prepare gifts together with his childhood friend and hang out with Shizuka.

However, when that very day arrived, the plans he had set beforehand had changed. This was because their father, who had left the house after the divorce, had contacted them saying that he didn't know if he would be able to come. Godou and Shizuka were facing each other.

"Well, what do you think? By the way, my vote is that he won't end up coming."

"I'll cast my vote for that too. But maybe he had some matters to take care of, want to wait a little more?"

For now there was a change of plans. On the night of the 3rd, both siblings spent their time at home. Their father had just sent

them an email at seven o'clock that night. It stated that he had some urgent business to take care of and left for Toronto, Canada.

"Well, that is to be expected of dad."

"This would only happen to father."

Both of them had little to say for this predictable outcome, therefore they could only move it to another day.

That "another day" was now today. Incidentally, the place they wanted to go was a very unique restaurant. They had delicious Spanish cuisine and wine.

This was the result after their father, who never showed up at the arranged time, and their laissez-faire mother had negotiated on the amount of money they could spend.

"This is our daughter's birthday. It would only be right to go out to eat some delicious food." The conversation had gone somewhat along those lines.

Also, because they received permission to bring one more person, it was settled that Asuka could come with them.

"But really, I haven't seen many families where the parents had to deal with every request through 'negotiating'."

After hearing the situation from the two siblings, their childhood friend Tokunaga Asuka sighed in sorrow.

The group was on the way to the restaurant. The place was within walking distance from the Kusanagi house in Nezu so the three of them decide to walk there.

“Really? I feel like this happens rather often.”

“It just comes in a different form; no matter which household, they all have similar situations.”

This theory was Godou's, who was in charge of negotiating with their parents. By his side, Shizuka also nodded in assent.

“Hey Godou, you should look up the difference between similar and the same again. Because you're like that even Shizuka is affected,” their pig-tailed childhood friend advised them.

She was unyielding and direct as always.

“I keep telling you, don't act like I don't have any common sense.”

“That's right, Asuka-chan. Onii-chan is having no effect on me. I can confidently say I'm the only proper human being in our household.”

When Godou refuted Asuka's accusation, Shizuka also complained a little.

No, for the sensible and humble older brother, the one more likely to transform into a monster was his sister; she just completely hid it.

During all of that nonsense, the three of them had arrived at the restaurant.

The two high school students and one middle school student stood in front of the entrance of a somewhat high class restaurant.

The restaurant's signs and decorations had style without being showy, and the lighting was dim as well. However, the restaurant' s food and wine were top grade and as a result dining here was quite pricey.

"Usually it's beyond our means, we came here to celebrate a birthday and we secured support for the funding. It's okay once in a while."

Godou was reasoning in front of the restaurant. Right beside him, Asuka frowned.

"You're really going to say something like that? With all the money saved from New Year's gambling, you can even have a feast for a king."

"Th-those savings didn't end up in my hands!"

His childhood friend knew many secrets that could not be said out loud.

Godou knew full well how problematic that was. Recently, the number of situations where he had to spend his "hidden assets"

had increased quite a bit. Situations like when there were no family members to accompany him during his trips out of the country.

In the end, the three of them still entered the restaurant.

Although it looked like a high class restaurant, the Kusanagi siblings were actually very familiar with the place.

Their grandfather or their mother would take them here from time to time. Plus the host, who is the shop owner and the chef, was not only a close neighbor they were well acquainted with but also their mother's drinking buddy. Occasionally, when the Kusanagi household held a drinking party, he was in the kitchen utilizing the skills of his specialty.

This was why the three of them didn't show any nervousness and just sat down after being led to their seats.

When calling this place for a reservation, they used a "do whatever you want" kind of attitude when ordering. As a result, many dishes were coming without interruption. White asparagus salad, Spanish-style egg rolls with plenty of potatoes, oil-grilled shrimp, beef tenderloin cooked in red wine. Paella[1] filled with lobster and other seafood.

The three of them were handling these delicious dishes while chatting about something that wasn't of importance.

At this moment, the store owner uncle came out of the kitchen and asked "Would you like to order some wine? We have some

very interesting ones." It wasn't until "Today everyone here is a minor" was mentioned, "Ah I see I see" that he finally understood what they were trying to say.

While reaffirming the absent-mindedness of their mother's acquaintance, the banquet continued smoothly.

Shizuka's and Asuka's face both had a look of satisfaction as the pudding served for dessert disappeared into their mouths.

Godou on the other hand preferred the bitterness of coffee over the sweetness. However, that was when he noticed. Rather nearby two people that he knew were sitting down.

"So Erica, what is the reason for calling me out today?"

"I just told you on the phone, didn't I? Lily, us two girls should occasionally get together to gossip, that's all. Recently I fell in love with that female novelist."

"Uugh, in other words you just want to threaten me, right!?"

"Don't talk nonsense. I just have a sudden urge to discuss literature...……Hey, for example I've had my thoughts about those short stories beginning with 'I'd like to convey these feelings to that person'."

"S-s-s-stop looking down on people! Even if those kinds of storylines might be overused or not, my heart will not waver for one bit! Just, just no matter what you say I'm not going to listen!"

"Hehe Lily, your voice is trembling."

Like music, the elegant voice and the cold yet lovely voice continued their discussion.

These were two people who never exposed this side of them at school. As a side note, their conversation was in Italian. It must be because they were old friends conversing in a relaxed manner.

Godou felt very apologetic, as if he was stepping into other people's personal matters.

But leaving without even greeting or saying a thing didn't sit well with him either. What to do... just as he was thinking it over, the girls noticed Godou.

Erica Blandelli suddenly had a look of tension on her face, her smile disappeared. An anxious Liliana Kranjcar maintained the stern look of a knight.

In order to "monitor" the god-slaying devil king, these girls had been dispatched from Milan. Due to this task's importance, the girls put forth their full attention towards monitoring him.

"Wait a minute, Onii-chan, what's with that lecherous stare?"

"I admit they really are very beautiful foreign young ladies, but your staring is rude."

He was suddenly accused by his sister and childhood friend.

"I-Idiots. They are just girls from my class. I was only surprised running into them here."

Godou only told them part of the truth. Shizuka let out an " Aaah" as if she remembered while Asuka gasped "eh".

"I've heard the rumors about those two…… so they were in Onii-chan's class."

"They are from high-level schools overseas and came to study here."

On the other hand, pretending to not have heard Godou's conversation, Erica, who was sitting at the other table raised her hand.

She called an employee to come over to her table (That said, the restaurant was run by the owner along with his wife and his mother, just the three of them).

The person who came to Erica's table was the owner's mother.

She and the blonde haired beauty had a brief talk. After the owner's mother nodded her head she left the table. Though she might have gone back to the kitchen, who knew that she would instead come to Godou.

Furthermore, she also had a very profound smile on her face.

"Those two ladies over there said they want to dine with Godou-kun no matter what. Ha ha, you and your grandfather are indeed alike, these kinds of situations happen a lot, don't they!"

Actually, this woman was a great fan of his grandfather.

That's why I said, please do not refer to grandpa and grandson together like that. Godou was muttering to himself while looking at the other table. Erica and Liliana were both giving him a dignified and sharp expression.

No matter what, anything would be fine as long as it didn't develop the way the owner's mother envisioned.

"Onii-chan, what is going on?"

"Godou, your bad manners offended someone!?"

"What are you guys getting so worked up about!? They are just students from my class sending an invitation. You two should go home first. I'll chat with them for a little bit."

Therefore, he switched tables and dinner once again continued.

After they were done enjoying the food, the two European girls silently drank some coffee. It was a stressful situation for Godou, who wasn't used to girls.

"I do feel that disturbing your family time was me being unaware of your general interests…"

Erica was the first to speak.

"But since we met up with someone that has the imperial title of Campione, if we were unable to make a greeting then that would harm the reputation of the Copper Black Cross. Let me say once more that it is an honor to meet someone of your status."

"No, let me say something."

Godou cut off Erica's endless display of etiquette.

"I believe I've said this many times before. Because this kind of formality numbs my back, talking like ordinary people would be just fine. Behave like you would before I turned into this type of person."

"Ok. I know clearly that if I do this again, it will become annoying."

No longer needing to use honorifics, Erica let out a smile.

The type of smile wasn't filled with affection, but rather like the smile of a lioness before going hunting.

"I am truly grateful to have met you before you became a god killer. If I had to bestow respect to you every time then I'm afraid I might not be able to converse with you."

His relation with Erica dated back to the spring of this year.

All the way back to before Kusanagi Godou slew the ancient Persian Warlord Verethragna.

Nevertheless, their relationship could not be described as close. Erica had always fearlessly displayed abrasive behavior towards the Campione.

"Erica... Hold on a sec. Even though he is young, Kusanagi Godou is still a Campione. Also, he is Sir Salvatore's ally and a dangerous -- excuse me, a most influential person. Only through appropriate speech and manners will you display the way of the knight."

Naturally, the one reprimanding her long-time friend was Liliana. Her attitude was quite stiff and formal as well.

Very likely, she too, had no intention of developing personal friendship with Godou.

"Please do not say that idiot Doni and I are good friends."

Godou tried to correct mistaken facts.

"I would be greatly troubled if you girls keep grouping us together."

"...Furthermore, the two of you destroyed Castello Sforzesco and caused a great commotion from your fight in Naples. Clearly there will be many opportunities for the two of you to fight as a united front."

Liliana eloquently voiced her objections.

"That kind of retort has many flaws in it so let's not talk about it . I have pretty much accepted the subtle and complicated relationship you two share."

"Complicated and subtle, what do you mean?"

"In short, it is like this. Your feelings for Sir Salvatore transcend the affections of friendship. Rather than a male friend, he is a person you love."

"L-Love!?"

Godou was stunned by these deductions which sounded like some famous detective's pontification.

"Of course, these kinds of immoral feelings cannot be discussed in front of other people. Furthermore, a young person like you could hardly admit to such an unusual sexual disposition. As a result, you firmly insist you hate Sir Salvatore yet you are deeply troubled over your inability to cut off your feelings of longing for him."

"It never occurred to me like that, but actually, it's quite reasonable and well thought out."

"No way is that reasonable! Don't make up my feelings ok!?"

Because Liliana's reasoning actually impressed Erica, Godou immediately denied it.

"All in all, it is a fact that no mere shallow relationship exists between you and Italy's powder keg and alliance leader in the world of magic."

"What powder keg... Stop talking nonsense."

Caught by Liliana's unexpectedly acute accusations, Godou muttered in response.

“But, me and that guy... or rather I should say, I am different from the other Campiones. If possible, I would like to continue living a peaceful life. Passing away on a tatami mat would be good enough for my satisfaction. Actions like this monitoring must be stopped.”

Erica and Liliana were said to be renowned and promising talents.

They were young knights from their respective magic associations, the [Copper Black Cross] and the [Bronze Black Cross]. To think these kinds of talents were dispatched simply to monitor Kusanagi Godou in Tokyo.

This was done in order to inspect the movements of the Campione allied to Salvatore Doni.

“What are you talking about, Kusanagi Godou? ‘Monitoring’ a godslaying devil king would be disrespectful and forbidden conduct.”

Erica distorted her lips and self-deprecatingly said.

“Indeed, were you to start some kind of incident, there exists the likelihood of unexpected effects propagating to Europe. If that

were to happen, we may have to contact our associations' headquarters. However, our purpose in Tokyo is simply studying abroad, in order to experience Eastern Asian culture."

"To experience Marco Polo's[2] orient travelogues[3] is a hard earned experience."

Even Liliana spoke knowingly.

"Exactly as she says, my king. Please do not mind us and just continue to live your life normally."

Hmm. Godou frowned. If this type of situation persists, then there would be no way to improve their relationship.

Regardless whom the other party was, if they were going to hang around by his side for long durations, he would prefer to establish friendly relations.

Part 3

Kusanagi Godou is a godslayer, also known as a devil king Campione.

Due to this title, he always encountered things that an ordinary high school student would be unable to.

The most extreme example would be two people from Italy sent to monitor him. Although, even in his home country of Japan there is an organization keeping an eye on him.

This group supervises Japan's internal incantation, magic, and other supernatural stuff.

That would be the Japanese official History Compilation Committee. Even this secret organization that employed ninjas from the olden days, seemed to have members concealed at Godou 's side. However, it is not certain to what extent their operation has reached.

But, there was only one person in contact with him that has her identity completely revealed.

It was on the way to class where he saw her figure from behind. While taking the usual path heading to school, he saw her walking in front at a distance of seven meters. Thanks to her tea colored and beautifully long hair that had slightly dense odor, she was immediately recognized.

Her name was Mariya Yuri. She was addressed as a Hime-Miko , an ability user.

This was how the Official History Compilation Committee treated people that had nobility status. These noble people cooperated and accepted many kinds of requests.

The nickname "Hime" was actually just a facade. At this moment she was wearing a deep blue duffle coat over her uniform , giving the appearance of a female student with a serious disposition. But her posture was very upright, her footsteps were orderly, and she gave off a temperament that was hard to offend.

Godou remembered his conversation with Erica and Liliana last night.

Even though their position is just to monitor him, Godou wanted to improve their relationship. He wanted to give it a try by being slightly more energetic. Once he made up his mind, Godou went up to greet her.

“Good morning, Mariya.”

“-----!? Good morning, Kusanagi-san.”

Yuri stopped in her tracks and looked back.

However, at that moment for a split second she let out an “uh” sound while her shoulders shuddered a bit. It was probably because she suddenly heard Kusanagi Godou—the Campione’s voice which startled her. Can’t say for sure if she was scared.

But, the expression on her face was calm when she turned her head.

The Yamato Nadeshiko's beautiful dignified face gazed at Godou continuously. That stern look had the potential to melt ice and snow into pure water. Plus, it was also very rigid.

At that time, the godslayer raised in Japan regarded her as an exceedingly dangerous person. This caused him to be on alert and stiff.

“I-I say. Being a little more relaxed is absolutely no problem.”

"You are one of the world's seven godslaying lords. Our mission is to show proper respect when dealing with someone of your rank. Please do not mind it."

Like that, Yuri replied to Godou while deeply bowing her head.

Her use of words and sentences were good, her manner was good, this kind of etiquette was totally devoid of any rudeness. However, Godou and Yuri are actually going to the same school and are in the same grade. It would be correct to say that their type of etiquette should be different.

In short, the concept of sensible etiquette is much different from the current one.

But Godou pretended not to care and attempted to casually talk to her.

"Well, let's just maintain this and converse a little. After all our destination is the same."

"Staying together with Kusanagi-san!?"

"Uh huh. Until we arrive at school, let's converse while we walk for the time being."

There were still about five minutes left until they reached the school gates. Even though the amount of time was short, it was always better than not saying anything at all.

Godou contemplated over this, but Yuri for some reason felt unexpectedly flustered.

"Y-Yes. Since this is the command of a king there is no way I can refuse. Although conversing with my humble self might not be able to satisfy you, I will at least accompany you."

Feeling like her time was being wasted on something insignificant, she solemnly accepted to seriously converse.

---Can talking with me really cause others to be afraid? Godou had a guilty state of mind.

A couple years ago Yuri was captured by Marquis Voban who had a reputation for being vile. As a result she was left with terrible memories. Perhaps she was influenced by that experience.

In any case, the two of them started walking on the path towards school.

So, what would be some good things to say? Godou tentatively proposed the first topic.

"By the way, the end of term exam results already came out. How did you do on the tests?"

"Y-Yes. Still about the same as my previous grades."

That's it. Yuri replied with little to say, leaving Godou with no way to smoothly expand on the topic.

The two of them continued to walk in silence. This was simply just walking side by side. This will not do!

"M-Mariya, although you are a Miko, can you still normally celebrate Christmas and other holidays of that sort?"

"Y-yes. There are no particular bans."

The talking once again ended. Further conversing has stopped and the two of them continued to walk on silently.

Godou understood his own defeat. It goes without saying that Godou, who wasn't used to dealing with girls, should have difficulty making a conversational breakthrough in this kind of situation.

Before he knew it the school gates were already in sight.

It looks like that is it for today. Godou cursed at himself for his incompetence, in addition he felt very sorry towards Yuri. To have scared her unnecessarily and such.

"I'm sorry. You actually don't want to accompany me right?"

He unconsciously apologized. Even he understood clearly to refrain from saying things not worth mentioning. It can be said that the technique he used to deal with girls was clumsy.

Forget that right now, after Godou apologized, Yuri's facial expression changed to that of embarrassment.

"Ah, no, it's not like that. Of course because I'm together with a Campione, I feel very nervous."

After her wall of formality slightly crumbled, her expression of bewilderment could be seen.

Seeing Yuri shyly mutter those words, Godou's heart skipped a beat. This really was the temperament of the Yamato Nadeshikos, full of charm.

"Add to the fact that this is my first time walking with a boy to the same school ……I must admit this makes me feel a little embarrassed. Even though this was once part of associating with the History Compilation Committee, it is still just the job of a Miko and nothing else. I'm still really not used to this type of work."

While the conversation was taking place between the two of them, they had already arrived at the front entrance of the high school.

"I sincerely apologize for not being able to converse very well. Excuse me, I must be leaving now."

Yuri intoned a quick apology while deeply lowering her head as her feet were already leaving Godou's side. She walked in the direction of her class's shoe cabinet.

Apparently Kusanagi Godou's and Mariya Yuri's interaction skills with the opposite gender were both very clumsy.

Looks like he can only wait for another opportunity and contemplate other ways to close the distance between them.

Godou was reflecting upon himself while changing his shoes, then headed off to class 1-5. Once he sat down, Takagi headed over . His hand was holding milk coffee cartons.

"Kusanagi! You bastard, you intend to betray us!?"

Godou was startled as a voice of sorrow reached him.

"What are you saying all of a sudden?"

"I just saw it! You and class six's Mariya-san were walking side by side!"

"It was only walking for a little while, nothing much. Why is that betrayal?"

"It can be said that Mariya-san can even be considered my school's fairest lady. She is commonly known as one of the endangered Yamato Nadeshikos. No matter how the guys approach her, even just walking side by side will be sweetly rejected by the highly ranked girl. To actually be able to walk together with that kind of girl, a guy like you cannot be underestimated!"

"Sure enough you were pointing to that. I did a not so favorable thing."

Because Godou was a Campione, that reason was probably why Yuri would walk together with him.

"I will pay close attention the next time I see you. You can say thank you to me, Takagi."

"Ugh. In the future you still intend to continue getting close to her? To go as far as thinking of every possible method to advance this impure association with the opposite sex, you traitor!"

"Stop talking nonsense. I only sought to converse with her a bit to take care of some matters. Basically, it was only just walking together." Godou appears to want to reconcile by calmly talking to the enraged Takagi.

"In the end I only said one or two lines at most."

"Really?"

"Mhmm. Oh yeah, didn't I borrow a game from Nanami before ?"

Godou recalled the time during the school festival when Nanami shoved a hand-held console and a game cartridge called " English Proper Maid Story: Maid Amy" at him.

"Although yesterday I tried it out for a bit when I was bored… …it turned out to be somewhat hard to play. That eviscerator killed me about three times."

Just by looking at the title you would think you would play as a female maid protagonist. The main protagonist is in fact her master, a college student who studies at the University of Oxford.

As a side note, the stage was set in 19th century England during the Victorian era. Godou started playing with a relaxed mood, but because together with Amy they were in pursuit of the mysterious Jack the Ripper in foggy London like in the novel's storyline, he became fascinated with the detective-like development.

However, in spite of this----- Godou had a sudden doubt.

In the past, he thinks there never would have been the opportunity to play something like this. It feels like there was once a person around him who always played this type of thing.

"But, I think it would be best to switch titles."

"Hohoho... You've only experienced the prologue of the story. From there you will start to be moved by the story of love and violent waves, your palms will be full of sweat, and tears will be streaming all over your face."

"Eh? Then yesterday I basically only read through something equivalent to half a bunkobon[4]!?"

"The game definitely has an overwhelming amount of content, but the plot development will never make someone feel bored. Instead, as the game's storyline continues to progress and the maid 's affection level increases, the story will arrive at the content of the official version. Forget about the people with a desire for maids, even someone who does not share that fetish will be brainwashed into monsters who love maids entirely. You've barely broken the surface here. "

"R-really? These recent games have been really profound."

Godou, who wasn't very clear on this aspect, deeply admired Takagi's explanation.

"How about we go to Akihabara later this month? It just so happens that "Amy" will take part in an exhibition sponsoring the setup of a maid coffee shop. In order to recreate the setting, they prepared specialized maid attire and they will be in business after the renovations of the front of the store are complete. It is very interesting."

"Akihabara's maid coffee shop? This doesn't seem like the type of thing that would interest me……."

After speaking, Godou let out a "hmm?" and began to ponder.

This was caused by the words he just uttered. Akihabara? Maid ? Maid coffee shop? He also felt that somewhere there was a missing piece of the puzzle.

This was a riddle full of gaps. Where could the puzzle pieces to fill in the gaps be --.

Part 4

Kusanagi Godou isn't one of those kinds of people who only talk but will not act.

Instead of being like the type of detective who just sits in his arm chair solving mysteries, he is someone who will quickly be on the move whenever he wants something done.

So on that day after school was over, he tried to go to Akihabara to leisurely walk around for a bit.

Precisely due to it being that time of the year, the streets were completely filled with Christmas spirit. Godou spent about an hour wandering aimlessly on these streets colorfully decorated by glamorous reds and greens.

"There was no use in coming here after all."

In the end he could only let out a sigh.

There were (perhaps) some festive activities scheduled to be held late in the month of December. He believed that by coming here he might recall some of his past memories. The little bits of expectation he had easily crumbled.

Of course, if there was something to be gained then it's still possible to have some feeling of benefit.

"That is the end for today, it's time to quickly head back."

Godou found himself on Central Avenue. This was the center of Akihabara's Electronics Street.

If he were to return to Nezu from here, there would be no other alternative besides going to the JR[5] Akihabara's station. For instance, if he wanted to go in the direction of Ueno from Central Avenue, then he could choose to utilize Tokyo's subway station. That kind of distance could even be considered as walkable.

Godou decided that for the time being he would walk towards Ueno. Engulfing this street was the momentum of continuous re-development. It felt like every time you came here there would be change occurring somewhere. Nowadays the appearance of the original Electronic Street is completely unrecognizable.

The old fashioned electronics stores as well as spare parts stores were already considerably rare.

Game stores, large retail stores, plus the newly added game stores along with the restaurants that were lined up in succession and western style clothing stores already became this street's main focus.

On the way, Godou took a map of the Electronic Street from a maid at a maid coffee shop.

After walking casually for some time, he arrived at Okachimachi.

Godou incidentally sensed the "monitoring" aura behind his back. By chance he looked behind him and noticed someone he knew. He decided to stop and wait for the other person to catch up .

Thus, the silver-haired beauty following him shrugged her shoulders and quickened her pace.

"Although it is not a big deal, could it be that you were closely following behind me this entire time?"

Approaching next to him was Liliana who appeared to be still dressed in a uniform. Her expression completely lacked any fear. Her face, which was like that of a rational female knight, stared straight at Godou.

"Yes. Today you seemed to be constantly thinking about something during class. Because of that, I was worried whether or not you were scheming to go somewhere to initiate a plan for a surprise attack."

"So that was why you were following me?!"

Liliana simply said 'yes' while nodding her head.

"Who would do that kind of thing? Hey Liliana, have some faith in me, ok?"

"Although I regret saying this, but that is very hard to accomplish. I understand very clearly that at critical moments you will engage in activities without any regard of the consequences."

"Uhh."

Godou was speechless after being coldly rejected. Because those kind of situations had occurred so many times, he was completely unable to deny this.

"T-Then at least greet me. If there is nothing to be ashamed about in what I'm doing, then it's safe to say that it would've been fine even if you didn't tail me. Watching what I do from my side should be fine right?"

"Eh? You want me to accompany you?"

"Uh huh. Compared to being followed by someone from behind this should be much more relaxing."

"Now that you mention it, this would be somewhat more convenient for doing my "job".....but I don't deserve that kind of praise to walk together by the King's side."

The silver-haired female knight wants to refuse politely. However, Godou was a step ahead and said--

"It's fine. Because I am a king, I give you the right to do that. Furthermore, a knight being at the king's side is not such an unusual thing, right?"

At that moment even he himself knew that he was just quibbling. But there was no other way.

Actually, while Godou appeared to have replied smoothly to the girl saying “walk together”, he was really in a state of confusion. He is thinking along the lines of how to deal with the statement he made just a moment ago.

However, even though this was considered to be barely enough of a justification, Liliana still thought about it.

“Well, it is a prestigious association’s great knight who is closely accompanying a Campione, but it’s not enough to consider this appropriate conduct……eh? “

The air of sternness from Liliana’s face suddenly declined exposing a flaw in her expression.

Looking at it this way, rather than a reliable knight, it would be more appropriate to say that she was an ordinary girl.

Godou was quite surprised at that inconceivable expression of hers and thought she was very cute.

Once his heart started to beat in an indescribable manner, Godou quickly inquired--

“What’s the matter?”

“Ah, yes. Now that I think about it, if I really wanted to “ monitor” -- -- I mean, conduct an observation on you, then continuously following alongside you would be reasonable. How come I haven’t been doing that until now?”

Even the way she spoke crumbled. However, this kind of Liliana was very refreshingly cute.

Sensing that the distance between them was reduced, Godou casually said:

"Then, want to start walking together?"

"Ah, yes. If you are fine with this then……."

The curtain of night was gradually descending as the time of day approached evening.

Godou was currently walking together with the silver-haired maiden during this sort of time in Ueno.

"Today you are just wandering the streets without a destination ……we are just taking a walk, even now it's like that?"

"Mhmm. Nothing to be concerned about. We are just taking a walk. In any case, it won't cause anyone trouble."

He couldn't say that the purpose for wandering around was to recall something forgotten in which the original details were unclear.

When Godou was talking he averted touching this topic. In addition, he said that up until now other than "taking a walk" he hadn't done anything else.

However, it was for that reason Liliana was concerned and mumbled.

“If only that was true……”

“Hold on. Today I only walked in the streets, nothing more, right? What is the problem with that!?”

Godou proposed a refutation. However the female knight countered while still showing a bit of anxiety.

“Normally speaking, of course there would be no problem. But, if it was something you did .....I think there is a possibility it would develop like this for example.”

Liliana started to slowly explain.

“During your walk you by chance encounter a heretic god. Afterwards, just like that the battle will immediately unfold, Tokyo will become a battle arena and as a result more than half the city will collapse changing it into vast ruins…… Furthermore, regarding this juncture after half a year, it will make the place uninhabitable. Tokyo will ultimately change in order to control the violence and brutality of the devil within the scope of the city---”

"Isn't that just your speculation?! It is merely a delusion!"

Godou disagreed to this kind of overly exaggerated future development.

“Yesterday it was the weird relationship between Doni and I, and now it is the things you recently said. Liliana’s thoughts on

these matters are always so serious. It's safe to say your ability to think wishfully is broken. Are you really someone who writes novels and such?"

"Ku-Kusanagi Godou, what did you just say?"

"Your ability to think wishfully is broken?"

"N-No, it was the sentence after that. How do you know about my hobby!?"

"Eh...huh?"

Godou, who was investigated in detail by Liliana, felt puzzled.

"Now that you mention it, how do I know?"

"There is only one person in the entire world who knows about this secret and that person is Erica. Could it be that you are pretending to have a bad relationship with that demonic woman while secretly exchanging information during appointments with her, do you intend to frame me or something!?"

"I-I don't know. There is no way I could know right?"

Godou was flustered while making his assertions.

"Maybe, there is a possibility that Liliana told me before? If it is not like that, then I shouldn't know this kind of thing."

"Not possible! I would never confess this type of thing!"

"Why not? It isn't a crime; generally speaking, one would usually talk about their own interests to other people right?"

"This kind of interest is pretty much for my own personal pleasure---no, to say it is pursuing the joys of this activity would be right. The people who unfold the wings of their imagination don't need to be afraid of the consequences, those kinds of wicked thoughts that shouldn't ever be seen by mankind should never be chosen…..In short I do this just to satisfy myself as well as to record the various sorts of things that float in my mind!"

"I-Is that so?"

Godou was overwhelmed by the violent surge of momentum from Liliana and had nothing better to say.

"That's right. Kusanagi Godou, this is why pertaining to this private matter, please keep this as a secret just between the two of us. Is that OK!?"

Ever since a moment ago, Liliana had already thoroughly forgotten about the matter of treating Campiones with respect.

The reason for that is probably because she was losing her mind due to fear. Godou felt that the request the silver-haired knight brought up, equal to that of an order from a godslayer devil king, was very interesting and made him felt comfortable.

"Having said that…….whether it's you or Erica, how could my secret …… Could it be that my security installations at home have deadly flaws …..?"

"S-Should we go over there and take a look!?"

In order to conceal this awkward atmosphere, Godou pointed toward the gaming center that was in front of them.

This was a commonly seen branch of large gaming centers.

Inside the large arcade that utilized all of the area within the four stories of the building, were entertainment facilities that had distinctive gorgeous decorations which were very eye-catching. It appears the place had been thoroughly cleaned as it was quite tidy inside.

Liliana showed a deep interest as she inspected the inside of the arcade.

"As a place where people can come and have fun late at midnight, it gives an impression of liveliness. It's different from what I imagined."

Liliana saw a little boy around the age of five with his dad who were both smiling.

The little boy was next to the Bunch of Heroe video game stations with an expression that was full of concentration as he pressed the buttons.

Since they hardly come here, they should probably find something to play. Godou spoke and inquired:

"Liliana, do you want to play something?"

Because it was his counterpart's first time at a video game center she roughly circled around the arcade first.

There were crane games, many older and newer games, online games and card games that utilized a pretty large gaming platform , as well as a space for cosplay, etc.

It was an awkward situation where she didn't know what to play first.

"You are right…….Honestly speaking, I don't have much interest in playing these things."

"Ah, as expected."

Godou nodded his head at Liliana's open-heartedness. Her line of sight swept past all things game related, instead putting the emphasis on checking the arcade's facilities and customers.

Sure enough, this fictitious contrasting so-called lifestyle could only be found in the witches of a fantasy world.

"Then, it's about time that we go back. I apologize for forcing you to come here."

"Ah, no need to apologize. To be able to see a place a person like me wouldn't normally visit alone gives me great satisfaction. Also, to say that I have no interest towards anything would be a lie ."

Liliana cleared her throat with a cough. All of a sudden she moved her face close to Godou.

"Please let me first confirm something."

"W-What is it?"

The female knight's serious face pressed closer towards his own . As a result, Godou became flustered.

"Kusanagi Godou, can you keep a secret from other people? Especially from the one who claims to be my friend. If you can defend my secret even from that demon-like woman……then please come with me to that place."

Three minutes later, Godou proceeded to the second floor along with the gracefully walking Liliana.

This floor contained crane games naturally arranged in at least ten different of categories. Liliana advanced towards the gaming station containing unusual fantasy animal dolls.

"Buying a pair of dolls would of course be the fastest method right?"

Liliana happily said this after just exchanging a one-hundred yen coin for the dolls in her hand.

"However, I also feel that hunting them with my own hands is a good experience for me to have. After all, hunting is one of the many things that knights take pleasure in, isn't it?"

"Don't you think it's a little far-fetched to regard the doll grabbing games as a form of hunting?"

"That's nonsense. One has to personally follow their prey, using their own skill to execute the kill in order for the object to become theirs. You see, isn't it essentially the same thing?"

The stern female knight let out a rare smile.

Godou controlled himself to not argue out his disagreement and spoke about another skepticism he had.

"But, what is there to hide from Erica? Well it's just a doll, isn't it fine?"

"No way! If she knows then that knight will keep saying over and over that Liliana Kranjcar has an arrangement of adorable dolls in her bedroom. I'm certain that woman will make a fool out of me. Could you allow this to happen?!"

Godou let out an "oh" as he thought deeply about Liliana's response.

If even the extremely secretive novel writing was figured out by the other person, then this level of secrecy should have already been leaked from the very beginning---Well, it probably won't make a difference even if this matter isn't discussed.

Even so, Liliana appeared to be indeed very joyful.

She was facing video games that were unfamiliar to her and was struggling to obtain her target.

Try and think about it. Arranging herbs, healthy foods, making desserts, knitting, etc., these are hobbies that girls usually liked and were completely proficient in.

Even those that like velvet dolls and delicate things really don't feel out of character.

(If I were to bring her to play at a large-scale amusement park, it seems she would be even happier…..)

Her stern appearance and atmosphere unwittingly faded away.

At Godou's side was the most "maiden-like" female, in reality isn't it just Liliana?

The novels were fine, the impression just then was fine, but it really felt like something was strange----.

In the end, under Godou's assistance she obtained five dolls.

The two of them left the gaming center. The surrounding area was already dark, having completely entered nighttime.

"Well, it should be time to go back right?"

"Yeah, the timing was perfect."

Godou and Liliana both nodded their heads and started to walk on the path leading towards the bus station.

Honestly speaking, there was also the thought of continuing together with her to go someplace to eat dinner. Furthermore, he thought about gradually increasing his relationship with Liliana. However….

Inviting a girl to eat alone together would be an excessively difficult crisis for Kusanagi Godou.

As a result, during the time they were silently walking--

"After receiving the prizes…….? Did some sort of divine presence pass us?"

Liliana's footsteps suddenly stopped.

Due to the hunting results, the feelings of the girl who was both a knight and a witch changed to that of extreme delight. Her face was getting clearer and clearer while her eyes were staring at the vastness of the sky. Could it be that she had a vision of the apocalypse?

After Godou marveled over this, the sensible gaze of Liliana was restored.

"Did you see anything?"

"Yes. Please let me verify a point. Right now do you feel the presence of a god?"

"No, none at all."

Campiones and gods are old enemies who are mutually aware of each other's existences. Although it isn't as if it wouldn't work if they weren't close to each other, if they were near a heretic god then a godslayers body and mind would be brimming with the power to fight.

"Does this mean a god has come here?"

"I don't think so. However, it appears that we aroused the existence of a strange presence nearby."

An ominous matter was heard.

Where can a suspicious monster exist within this vicinity? Godou looked all around.

It was Christmas Eve, the streets were starting to become active but it also felt like something was unstable at the same time. This area near Ueno's bus stop had a lot of people coming through here so it was pretty noisy-- --what?

A portion of the people who were walking along the sidewalk looked like they were astonished at something.

They were gesturing, talking, and whispering to one another while squeezed together around the display case of a small department store.

Godou used an eye signal and Liliana responded by nodding her head. The two of them closed in towards that direction. They quickly understood the reason for the disturbance. This was because there were two young girls that were loudly talking.

"It really happened in a split second! Just a moment ago, the figure of an ordinary Santa Claus changed to 'that' thing in a flash! "

"Eh, you are kidding right? Wasn't it like 'that' from the start?!"

"Of course not! You better look closely!"

They were standing in front of a large toy store. After cramming himself up towards the display window, Godou was totally in shock. What was there really was a substitute devoid of any beauty.

Presently, Santa Claus could be considered a scene from Christmas.

He was a jolly old man with white hair and a white beard who wore a distinctive red outfit.

Because this was a toy shop, the display window had a variety of Santa Claus figures placed behind it in order to raise the Christmas atmosphere in the streets.

For the figure of Santa Claus that Godou was looking at, the entire body was gray.

The red clothing was gray. The skin, white hair and beard were all gray. The bag over his shoulders was also gray. It made people feel that they were watching a black and white T.V., it was all in one color of gray.

"A gray Santa Claus…….? No taste at all."

No matter how much you decorated it, there was no way to recover the essence of Christmas right?

However, she just said "it changed like this in a flash"?

"……Kusanagi Godou. It appears that something strange has happened." Said Liliana as she opened her eyes which had been closed. She seemed to have used clairvoyance with the 'Witch's Eye'.

"At this plaza in front of the station, all the Santa Claus…… figurines, pictures, and even the people in Santa Clause outfits all turned gray."

"Are you saying that regardless of what color it is, they will all turn into the same color as this object?"

"Precisely. This change carries some significance----however it is difficult to believe. But no matter what it is, every Santa Claus really did turn gray."

Liliana had a perplexed tone while giving her report.

Godou tried to circle around the nearby area looking for any red Santa Clauses.

But not even one was found.

The drawing of Santa Claus on the poster was also gray.

The Santa Clause doll decoration within the store turned gray as well.

Furthermore, this kind of color change even affects the cosplay of Santa Clause for the young customers. In this situation, only the clothing changed colors though.

Around twenty percent of the magnificence was lost in the composition-- --it just gave people this kind of feeling.

Furthermore, in the streets that were already overflowing with the 'grayified' old philanthropists, the people who passed by were bewildered and dumbfounded.

After returning to Liliana, Godou quickly said:

"Was this strange phenomenon caused by the guy Liliana mentioned just a moment ago?"

"It seems that thinking of it like that shouldn't be wrong…… this sort of thing is simply a prank. It's hard to understand why someone would do such a thing."

In front of the knight who seemed to be puzzling over this, Godou held his arm.

He could not remember what he scheduled before Christmas and now a small scale strange event has occurred.

In comparison to a Campione who has been always battling gods, no matter how you look at it, this was entirely a small scale event.

Although generally speaking, all of this was incomprehensible. However, looking at this situation, one point that was certain was this will be a troublesome matter.

Chapter 2 - Pursuing the Gray Mystery

Part 1

"Well, because the harmful effect turned all the Santa Clauses in the area grey, many people are still suffering from these disturbances."

The explanation was carried out in a composed manner from an old acquaintance.

It was Amakasu Touma from the History Compilation Committee. He was a young gentleman wearing a suit full of creases.

Their destination was located at the Nanao Shrine within the high grounds of Toranomon, just within the borders of the shrine to be exact. This was the shrine where Mariya Yuri was devoted to performing her duties as a hime-miko. She was accompanying Amakasu at his side.

"Those who bought a Santa Claus mini-skirt costume for this special occasion have no choice but to buy another one. The promotional items specially printed with Santa Claus art must now be reprinted. The Santa Claus illustrations that the children personally drew from the bottom of their hearts and were looking forward to gift have now been ruined by a bad mix of colors. Things like these were numerous. However,"

Even if the situation was the same as before, at a glance, Amakasu was clearly giving them a type of dejected appearance.

But this time, Godou was naturally able to understand why.

He really believes the situation is harmless.

Yesterday, Godou witnessed the strange phenomenon where a Santa Claus costume turned into a grey color. After school was over, Godou paid a visit to the Nanao Shrine. Just when he was about to inquire with Yuri about this matter, Amakasu showed up to explain the circumstances. But while Amakasu was talking about the strange situation, his mood was more relaxed than usual.

"Although it is a strange event, it is only so in this manner. It shouldn't be a god stirring up trouble. Therefore, this inconvenience doesn't have nearly enough significance for the necessity of a dignified Campione-sama right?"

"Since it would be Kusanagi-san's actions, it might instead cause the strange phenomenon to go a step further and expand."

The person who cautiously stated this was Yuri. This was the History Compilation Committee's suggestion — — no, this was exactly what they hoped for presumably. They are requesting him to not get involved, obediently staying put.

A devil king Campione is a prestigious being who would cause the break out of a fire setting everything in flames.

Who was the person that said this phrase before? Godou pondered on this indistinct memory while feeling this sort of prejudice against him was unfair. I'm obviously different compared to those other guys — —.

"However, isn't it actually the breakout of an event?"

Putting those troubles aside for now, Godou complained in the following manner.

"Yeah. It wasn't just the lone occurrence witnessed by Kusanagi-san in Ueno. Within these past four - five days, this incident has already happened more than ten times. The locations of these incidents include Shinjuku, Roppongi, Ikebukuro, Ueno, Otemachi, Ginza, Shin-Okubo, Ebisu, Sangenjaya..... well, there are other various spots too."

"They are all places where there is a large flow of people....."

"Indeed. Some speculations can be established for this incident. But the facts are basically what I have stated. I feel they are about right."

"Hey, that's pretty impressive. Why is this happening though?"

Godou felt admiration towards the capable Amakasu's special agent-like rhetoric.

However, he instantly let out a 'hmm?' feeling puzzled.

"I'm afraid this is some sort of retaliation. This hatred towards Santa Claus evolved from an unwelcomed class of people who are administering revenge against those who have attained happiness and fulfillment! Hating Christmas.....as a result, they attempt to destroy the symbolic Santa Claus figure where everyone can see! Something along those lines."

"Sorry, but the explanation you just gave contain some ambiguous terms."

"I agree. Whom does the so-called 'unwelcomed class of people' refer to?"

After Godou finished speaking, even Yuri, who spoke and conducted everything with caution, raised a question.

Amakasu had this bad habit of unscrupulously using insider terminology.

"No, just hear me out. During Christmas there are numerous lovers who appear to be brimming with happiness right? Among the people who see this sight, those unwelcomed wizard related bastards will be enraged and be unable to resist——what an unimaginable reality that would be."

Godou conjured a wry smile and once again inquired from Amakasu after his explanation.

"Can you really solely change the color of Santa Claus using magic and such?"

"This foolish matter of people delving into those kinds of dreary magic types, forgive me I have never heard of such a thing. In contrary to what one might expect, this is a high possibility. However, well....."

Amakasu momentarily paused at this point during his explanation.

"Even the witch Liliana-san — — even with her keen senses she couldn't detect the aura of the type of magic that was used. She was only able to attain bits and pieces."

Amakasu elaborated when facing techniques with large scale effects it is comparatively easier to detect.

"There probably exists a user conducting some very clever concealment tactics. Although, I can't figure out why someone would pull this kind of idiotic prank and carry it out to this extent. "

"A prank.....?"

"I can't say for sure but the criminal might also be taking this very seriously. However if we simply look at this strange phenomenon, it's really quite insignificant. This is something that can be cleared up as soon as we send out Committee members to investigate. Since this case must be handled before Christmas, my side will do everything it can to figure out a solution."

Amakasu ensured Godou would stay out of the way by using a nonchalant way of speaking to decline him.

After leaving the Nanao Shrine, the color of the sky had already turned into complete darkness. Godou got on a tram at the Toranomon station, but not for the sake of going home. He got off the bus at Ginza route's Ueno station to return to the street he went to yesterday.

It was December, the end of the year. The streets were filled with a busy atmosphere.

However, during this time period the one big event the high school students were worried about, the final exams, had already finished. Every year there would be final exams held during late December.

As a result, Godou was able to stroll the streets worry-free every night.

"Why would they care so much....."

Godou muttered while walking in front of Ueno station.

These streets were bustling with activity. There were the office workers returning from work, students, young people dressed in casual etc., in short the amount people outside were numerous. The night had just begun. This time of the day served as the dividing line for the commencement of formal nighttime activities.

Although it was already evening, the surrounding area was exceptionally bright.

There were street lights, store lighting, bright billboards, the headlights from the cars traveling along the road, etc. Thanks to all the illumination, a person could easily survey this street. Well, Campiones have remarkable night vision capabilities so regardless of whether or not it was completely dark around him, there would be no inconveniences, even if the only illumination source was from the evening starlight.

Godou roamed the streets of Ueno while deeply in thought. Recently there was no way to comprehend much about the situation. He was unable to remember his plans around Christmas and why that Liliana person, who he supposedly knows, is spying on him. Furthermore there was the emergence of the grey Santa Claus drama. Granted if someone were to sit back and watch without any regards towards these matters, it would looks as if none of these issues were consequential.

His chest was burdened with a troubling premonition.

Using a game of baseball as an analogy, perhaps the scenario's development would be as follows.

In the first inning you score seven points thus leading by a huge margin. However, the opponent nevertheless makes a comeback one point at a time. On the other hand, your own side was unable to score any more points. Without realizing it, the score had already caught up to a mere one point differential — — just like that.

"No matter how I go about it, I still can't seem to understand."

Being a healthy male, Kusanagi Godou's physical endurance and his leg strength in particular, was far greater than his intelligence. With that being the case, visiting the crime scene 100 times, like in those cop flicks, to continuously search that one location until finding the needed clues is not necessarily a bad thing. In completing this simple task, he would put in his utmost efforts.

Yesterday, Santa Clauses were being greyified on the street in front of the station.

However, the Santa Claus figures, pictures, drawings, and outfits that were all contaminated with the color grey have been disposed of a long time ago. The streets were once again covered with the reds and greens of Christmas.

Everything was returned to its original condition due to the laborious work from these justifiably proud Japanese people.

However, right now Godou felt really infuriated towards this. He was unable to find other clues — — just when he started pondering over the current situation, his cellphone's ringtone sounded.

After retrieving his cellphone, he looked at the bright display screen and saw it was Liliana calling him.

"Speaking of which, why do I have their phone numbers registered?"

Godou was baffled. It wasn't just the phone numbers of Liliana, Erica, and Yuri, their emails and addresses were already registered as well. He believes his relationship with them would be incapable of having this kind of exchange of personal information.

In short, he decided to first put aside his suspicions and answer the phone.

'Seeing you come over here too is quite unexpected.'

Liliana suddenly stated this. 'Too'?

'Please do the same thing you did yesterday, turn your head around and look behind you.'

Surely she must be kidding. Godou turned his head around and saw the female knight, who was wearing personal attire for today, standing behind him talking on the phone.

Part 2

The magic association Liliana was affiliated with was the 《 Bronze Black Cross.

As its name suggested, the blue and black were the symbolic colors for the organization.

This was perhaps the reason why whenever Liliana wore her personal clothing, the two colors blue and black were bound to be somewhere on there. However, today she was dressed in an outfit

that consisted of a rarely worn white mono-colored coat paired with deep gray pants. Nevertheless, Godou noticed where they were.

It was on the scarf wrapped around Liliana's neck. The scarf's design consisted of blue and black vertical stripes.

This applied to Erica as well. The European knight was surprisingly diligent in this aspect. She would naturally display her own affiliation explicitly——.

Liliana, who was secretly being admired by Godou, stated her reason for coming here.

"Regarding yesterday's situation where a Santa Claus changed colors, it was assumably a prank devised by a magician somewhere. Disregarding it would most likely be fine——But then something else occurred to me."

The two of them had kept their distance from the crowd of people meandering about and proceeded to converse after arriving at a guardrail alongside the road.

"In any case I'm also a magician. Even though I'm not on the same level as Mariya Yuri, I'm still sensitive to the presence of magic. However, I wasn't able to detect the bizarre event that transpired yesterday. Basically there was someone very shrewdly concealing it I presume. Due to the suspiciousness of going to this extent, I'm here to do a quick investigation."

Using a resolute tone, she spoke of the same uncertainties Amakasu had pointed out.

The diligent Liliana had not neglected this matter so perhaps that was why she wanted to ascertain the answer.

“Well Kusanagi Godou, why did you come back here?”

“For me it is…..although I have many reasons, ultimately it is probably due to this gut feeling that I possess. I always felt very mindful towards this situation and because of that I want to investigate its cause. I guess you can say my intuition dictated so.”

Godou stated his reply. Well, let's assume he did have many reasons. However, regarding that perspective, they were changed to “gut feeling” and “intuition”.

Godou was worried she might be unable to understand this kind of explanation.

“As expected of you, I get a sloppy animal-like reasoning.”

Liliana heavily nodded, indicating an expression of understanding. Was she thoroughly familiar with what kind of person Kusanagi Godou was? Although Godou wanted to press the matter, he felt questioning her would result in an annoyed response.

“Hey, if you don’t mind.....would you like to accompany me?”

“Accompany you!?”

Liliana suddenly went into a total state of shock.

“As in like a female escort accompanying a man!? E-Even though these are the words spoken by a supreme Campione, this command is still quite hard for a young girl like me to accept!”

“H-How did you construe it as that? What I meant was to investigate the cause of yesterday’s situation together.”

Godou supplemented his explanation towards the flustered Liliana.

She was a strict and diligent knight. However, she seemed to be hiding a very ordinary girl-like side of her. No matter what she encountered, she would easily be side-tracked by romance.

Godou felt slightly distressed as he wryly smiled. This aspect was perhaps to Liliana's advantage.

“P-Pardon my loss of composure.....Going back to what I said, is this your command as king?”

Liliana spoke after slightly blushing.

“The investigation this time would be akin to individual research. If it is a request proposed by a Campione, the king of us magicians, to jointly trace this mystery——no, even being the devil king's servant in investigating this mystery is something I won't shy away from."

Her serious demeanor made it feel like she was challenging a barbarous tyrant, or perhaps testing a person's moral character. Within the words Liliana had said, it felt like there was this subtle meaning.

"I feel that if it is some outsider who doesn't know anything about magic raising this request, I'll have to give it some thought. Being on the move individually is comparatively more convenient since having to explain this specialized knowledge would become very troublesome."

“I-I guess you're right."

In short, the meaning behind her words pointed to a "hindering outsider", causing Godou to cower.

Indeed this was the case. The specialist Amakasu should have already started his inspection. The talented witch Liliana was also on the move in order to investigate.

There were no particular justifications for admitting a clueless outsider.

If a battle against a god did not occur for Kusanagi Godou, there were no other uses for him. Compared to a normal person, he only had the advantage in terms of physical strength. Well, if the opportunity arises in which a heretic god does appear from this strange phenomenon, then it would be a completely different matter. However, nowadays even that situation would hold little significance.

Even so, he felt that he had to unravel this mystery of the grey Santa Claus.

So wasn't it already mentioned before? There was the option of stating 'this is an order from a Campione'.

After Godou deliberated over this enticing offer for about ten seconds, he instantly gave up on the thought.

For the men who would say these words, as a devil king this would be a different issue, but as a human being they would already be hopeless.

"I understand, I will find a way to do this myself then. I'm sorry for bringing up a strange request."

After Godou made a candid apology, Liliana let out a sigh.

"Kusanagi Godou, during times like these you should proclaim ' this is an order from a Campione'. By the way, you should've also punished the disobedient Great Knight who didn't show respect towards the king.....No matter what the situation is you never resemble a devil king!"

In the end, she actually spoke in a startled tone to scold him. Furthermore, she was resolute in her assertion towards the matter.

“However, fortunately I'm also an Italian knight. Despite the numerous problems the devil king I pledged my loyalty to has, I

have already adapted to being an assistant. From now on when I am giving instructions——no, when I am talking, please listen carefully."

"Eh?"

Her nationality was Italian but she actually has Croatian blood since she emigrated from Eastern Europe. The fairy-like maiden with a complicated ethnic background had a mischievous expression while making a comparison between two Campiones.

Godou was astonished at Liliana's slight act of mischief and replied:

"Are you saying you will work together with me?"

"Yup. From the moment we convened I already had this intention."

".....Then, why did you say all those things!?"

"About that.....why did I do it? It appeared as long as I pressed on in this manner, you wouldn't be able to give out commands as a king.....that's how I felt."

Liliana suddenly revealed a gentle smile.

That was not her usual sternness, but rather an occasionally seen natural side of her. Her innocent smile suited that of the girls around her age. For some reason, this sort of smile made Godou feel very nostalgic. Brimming with loveliness, his heart could not help but skip a beat.

"As a result, I wanted to give it a shot. I'm very sorry."

This type of apology presented no sense of regret. However, Godou was actually incapable of saying anything in response.

"Didn't you discuss this with the History Compilation Committee just recently? Ultimately it was impossible for you to adopt that hardline attitude Amakasu has, thus you came here by yourself right?"

"Uhh....."

Godou was at a loss for words after she saw right through him. How did it turn out like this?

The relationship between Liliana and him was not even that close. However, it was quite unimaginable as to how she understood what type of person Kusanagi Godou was. Godou also had a very clear grasp on the temperament of Liliana Kranjcar.

This was all really hard to comprehend, but this realization would actually make anyone happy.

All in all, Godou did get himself a capable helper.

"The part that I am concerned about is the phenomenon of Santa Clauses changing color."

Liliana spoke while setting a teacup for black tea in front of Godou.

After they met up in Ueno, the two of them went to a single-family house in Dangozaka. This house, which was Liliana's temporary dwelling while she was in Japan, was fairly close to the Kusanagi household in Nezu-Sanchome.

The two of them were residing in the living room which had windows along the southern side. The sunshine seemed quite breathtaking.

"Are you referring to the color change from red to gray?"

"Yes.....Well, perhaps it might not be as simple as just changing the eye-catching primary color into a dull color. There was also the scene from the spirit vision bestowed upon me during yesterday's quick inspection."

"Now that you mention it, there were quite a few things you referred to."

"I envisioned for a brief moment that the scenery of the streets changed to a scene similar to that after the harvest. In addition, there was some sort of divine presence that passed through and gathered what appeared to be grain heads scattered along farmland after the harvest....."

"It seems to resemble farm work."

Godou spoke with very straightforward thinking.

"Yes indeed. If it is farm work, it would mean that the scene pertains to the grace of earth. Perhaps the Santa Clauses losing their red color carries profound significance."

Liliana began to thoroughly articulate her explanation.

"The Santa Claus referred to in Japan was originally Christianity's guardian saint, St. Nicholas."

"St. Nicholas and Santa Claus.....no matter how you sound it out they are completely different."

"The reason is simple. Japanese people must have learned about the culture of Santa Claus through America. However this social custom was actually brought to America by an immigrant from Holland."

Liliana retrieved a notebook and began writing Latin characters on it.

"St. Nicholas is read as St. Nicholas when using a Dutch pronunciation. The American pronunciation 'Santa Claus' resulted from what was supposed to be pronounced as 'Sinterklaas' through an incorrect accent."

Saint NICOLAS Sint Nikolaas Sinterklass

After that, Liliana lastly added Santa Claus in conjunction.

"The image of Santa Claus spreading gifts to the children while riding a sled driven by reindeers comes to mind when mentioning

St. Nicholas. This stereotype was established in America roughly around the 19th century. The red outfit that became his raiment was instituted during a time period much closer to the present."

"Ah.....In that case, the juncture was triggered by the Cola company's publicity activities."

After hearing Liliana say that, Godou recalled something.

The color red had become a recognized color for the well-known North American beverage manufacturing company since the 1930s when they wanted to raise winter sales figures by publicly advertising through the use of Santa Claus. His image would always appear on posters and as expected the color of his outfit was in red.

The red outfit of Santa Claus coming from the red color of a cola can, this reality sounded like a joke.

"Before the red outfit wearing Santa Claus became a prominent public figure throughout the world, there wasn't this kind of modern saying that Santa Claus was the same existence as St. Nicholas, rather his character was more analogous to some sort of fairy. During that period, the gifts he dispersed were fruits."

"So to sum it all up, it wasn't gifts of hope."

"The fruits were ripened grains that were reaped from earth's bountiful harvest——symbolizing the grace of earth. Dating back its origin, this so-called Christmas was known as the religious ceremony for the Saint who descends upon the winter festivities to

bestow bountiful harvests for the earth. This could be traced back to rituals held during ancient times."

"Religious ceremony....."

Even those refusing to accept the truth would be compelled to remember the words "heretic god".

Overall, Godou felt he was able to understand the issue Liliana was worrying about.

"Is it that one? For the time being, regardless of the identity of the current Santa Claus, we should probably refer to him as St. Nicholas rather than saying he is the Santa Claus from the time when red wasn't associated with him. Maybe that guy will become a heretic god after arriving here."

"Not 'maybe', he will turn into a heretic god I presume."

Liliana simply agreed.

"I'm afraid that St. Nicholas, who has arrived at these grounds, possesses the earth attribute of the god of bountiful harvests and divinity deriving from the Catholic Saints."

"Is that really the case!?"

"Yesterday you couldn't feel the presence of a god. For that reason, I feel like I might be overthinking this. But on the other hand, there is no way to assert complete safety."

"I agree. In the end, we should perform a quick investigation for the sake of caution."

Godou and Liliana both nodded. During times like these, their equally serious personalities allow them to communicate more efficiently.

"The person in yesterday's spirit vision wasn't St. Nicholas, maybe the revelation is connected to the origins of earth's essence. Let's just first try to investigate with these clues ok?"

While the two of them were talking to each other, the door to the living room was opened.

It was Karen Jankulovski, Liliana's exclusive maid.

This rarely seen outfit was not her maid uniform but rather it seemed to be her personal attire which consisted of a blue coat and a black fur hat. Her hand was dragging a suitcase with wheels attached, giving the impression that she was about to go on vacation.

"Welcome Kusanagi-sama and welcome back Liliana-sama. I am very sorry for being late in my greetings."

Karen spoke while having her head deeply lowered.

"You still haven't left yet Karen?"

"Mhmm. On the account of some urgent matters arising right before I intended to leave, I had stayed here up till now.....

However, thanks to this I was able to see some good drama, fufufu .”

Karen was snickering while chatting with her master.

“I never would have thought Liliana-sama would bring a male Campione into her house while I was away. Even though it’s hard to keep a person’s lips sealed, please don’t worry, maids are very adept at maintaining their master’s secrets.”

“D-Don’t get any strange ideas!”

“May the two of you slowly enjoy this evening. Well then, goodnight.”

After Karen snickered and bestowed a bit of courtesy, she left.

“Where is that girl heading?”

“Eh, yeah, Natale is fast approaching. In order to let her celebrate the holidays together with her family, I granted her a vacation for this special occasion. After finishing her preparations she will head back to her home country.”

This so-called Natale was actually Christmas in Italian. In contrast to Japan, most people in Europe would spend the holidays with their family. This was probably the reason why she showed such consideration towards her.

Going back to what was said, the sound of the Christmas's footsteps were gradually drawing closer. Were they capable of finding the solution to this problem before the arrival of Christmas .....?

Part 3

It was currently December 18, the time of year was fast approaching Christmas.

The graduation ceremony will commence in three days from now, therefore the Jounan Academy seniors only had morning classes. However, today Liliana was absent in class.

This was why after Godou finished his classes, he went straight to her home without even eating lunch.

After pressing down on the gate's doorbell, the sound of Liliana 's voice came across the intercom.

'The door isn't locked, please come in.'

Since Godou was paying a visit to a girl's house, he felt very embarrassed as he pushed open the door.

Moreover, the exclusive maid of the house had already returned to her hometown in Italy. The owner of the house resided here by herself for the time being.

Godou concealed his slightly wavering feelings as he entered the living room.

Liliana was currently here engaged in work. The reason why she was absent from school was for her to finish the magic preparations.

"Please be careful to avoid entering the center area of the map. Sorry for the inconvenience."

Every place in the living room, including the tables and couches , was tidied up. The object expanded across this spacious room was a huge aerial photograph taken from the skies overlooking Tokyo. Its dimensions were probably around three meters in length and four meters in width. Liliana was crouching down on one knee over the map.

Godou noticed the location on the map where Liliana was situated was the Bunkyo region.

It was Bunkyo Dangozaka on the map——Liliana was crouching over the coordinates to this house.

Furthermore, it felt like there were quite a few incantations instilled within this Tokyo district on the aerial photograph.

"You used some kind of magic on this right?"

"Yes, searching magic.....I guess you could say that I carried out these preparations in order to utilize this magic."

Liliana maintained her crouching position as spoke.

She extended her right hand and moved the fingertips of her index finger and middle finger towards the map. Liliana, who was a Templar Knight and witch, released an incantation from those fingertips.

"If it is precisely as we said yesterday in which the red lacking Santa Claus is an existence related to earth's bountiful harvests, this existence might discharge a slight upsurge in spiritual energy at the location where the phenomenon happens. I plan on releasing a hunting dog to confirm this."

"Liliana, you raise that sort of thing?"

"Of course this is accomplished by employing a familiar called forth through summoning magic. We witches are the miko descendants who serve the goddess of the sky and earth. The attribute to summon a beast and commanding it to pursue the spiritual energy of earth isn't really an arduous task."

Princess Alice, Lucretia Zola, and Liliana Kranjcar.

These were the three witches Godou knew. It is said that they benefited from being naturally gifted with manipulation magic unaccessible to normal female magicians (for example those like Erica).

The scope of this type of magic was precisely witchcraft. Erica had raised this subject at some point in the past.

She said 'even though I really don't want to admit it.....but for the sky and earth, in other words, magic involving the elements of nature, Liliana far surpasses me'.

Except why was he unable to recall when it happened and where it took place?

"However, if we choose to execute in this manner we must send the hunting dog sprite toward Tokyo. Doing this will require time and effort.....I guess you can say that like anything it will have its dangers."

"Well, we can't just release those monster-like beings and not look after them."

Godou had previously battled a magical beast familiar summoned through the use of magic. Even a small causal disturbance could result in fatal injuries towards humans.

"Hence I added voodoo magic to this map of Tokyo. When the hunting dog is released on this map to conduct its probing, it enables a much quicker result that is equivalent to actually being within the capital Tokyo."

As she finished speaking, Liliana moved her fingertips away from the photographic map. It seemed like she finished casting her magic.

This so-called voodoo magic was a term from folklore. Say for example, a person who was detested had their hair buried inside a doll that was to be burned. In that case, the detested person

himself would be burned to death. Of course the result from this kind of incantation when one wishes to exert supernatural properties on an object is akin to the object becoming a replacement for the target itself.

"Are the preparations ready? Where is the hunting dog?"

"The preparations are already finished. This is it."

The object Liliana took out was a pig which she set down by her foot.

It was a doll in the shape of a pig. Two days ago, Liliana won this toy at a video game center. It was designed to be palm sized, a style that allowed it to be rocked about, but it had quite a sinister expression.

".....But upon inspection, it's just a pig doll."

"This pig doll is infused with spirit from the essence of earth. The reason why I previously stated it was going to be a hunting dog was merely so you could easily comprehend. I thought since we must pursue spiritual energy, a spirit pig, an animal which avidly uses its sensitive snout, would be the best choice. I'm about to start."

"Nah, it wouldn't have mattered whether it was a dog or pig."

Godou went on to state. Verethragna's authority, the [Boar], is also categorized as a type of pig.

"For objects that are specially applied with some sort of wizardry magic, I actually feel like compared to a doll, using something similar to a small prop would have been better....."

"T-This happened to be the only thing I had on hand resembling a pig!"

Liliana seemed slightly embarrassed as she retorted.

"If we are able to confirm an upsurge in spiritual energy, then let's first try heading towards the actual location ok? If there happens to be Santa Clauses being grayified or if it already happened, there is a high possibility it could be much more frustrating than a prank carried out by a magician somewhere."

Regardless of which, the searching magic had already been applied without a hitch.

On the large photographic map that Liliana had prepared, the pig doll was slowly moving at a speed of around one or two centimeters per three minutes.

As expected, no one was shifting the pig around, it was independently crawling.

"However, waiting around is quite monotonous, how about we go eat lunch?"

Godou brought up this suggestion. It had already passed noon a long time ago and his stomach was still empty.

"Ah, no thanks. If possible, please help yourself since my undertaking requires me to maintain the voodoo magic on the map."

Liliana replied in this manner towards Godou's lunch invitation .

"Then I'll probably just go buy something. Liliana, is there anything you want to eat?"

Since his partner was preoccupied, he wanted to go run an errand for her. From Godou's perspective this was a rightful concern that was to be expected in this situation.

Liliana revealed an unhappy expression on her face. She frowned in a way as if she was preaching something.

"Didn't I say this yesterday? The fulfillment of your role as a devil king Campione remains significantly inadequate. This is the first time I've heard of a devil king going out to buy lunch."

"That has nothing to do with it. I am different compared to guys like that old timer Voban. I'm going shopping at a supermarket anyways, so I can pick up some bread while I'm at it."

Godou shrugged his shoulders after he finished speaking. Liliana's expression changed to that of complete astoundment.

"You should also find a butler or maid in order to distance yourself from these miscellaneous tasks since you are one of the seven Campiones in this world."

"A high school student having either a butler or maid following them, I haven't heard of such a thing before either."

"Well then, Kusanagi Godou is certainly a godslayer. That being the case, this moment makes for a great opportunity. Please begin slowly adapting to the pleasures of being attended to by other people ok?"

Because of the perplexing words Liliana stated, Godou questioned her with an 'eh?'.

To maintain the voodoo magic, the only necessity was to supply the incantation while being within close proximity.

As a result, during that period of time a person is free to do other activities without a problem——. Liliana put on her commonly used apron and entered the battlefield that is a kitchen. Prompted by the replacement of her sword with a kitchen knife, chopping board, flat frying pan, ladle, and things of that nature, she was struggling.

"I-Is there anything I can help with?"

"No need to worry. As the king you should just relax and wait over there."

The well-intentioned proposal was outright rejected.

Godou could only watch from the kitchen entrance as the proficient cook Liliana prepared the dishes. Having a girl cook for me personally is really——。

What seemed to be a vertigo of mixed emotions and confusion had hit Godou.

Liliana wore a black sweater along with blue jeans. After adding the apron, a sense of determination could be perceived from this appearance. This sort of adjustment gave him a very distinct feeling of having entered a girl's personal domain.

The Godou as of now was neither a godslayer nor a Campione. Continuously standing there in fear, he was simply a man who was still unaccustomed to girls due to having no girlfriend experience at his age.

After waiting approximately thirty minutes, Liliana was finally done cooking and had swiftly cleaned the cooking utensils. Lunch appeared to be ready.

However, right now the pig was still in the living room traversing around on the map.

"Want to go outside and enjoy today's beautiful weather? Despite it being a tad cold, at least there is no breeze."

Liliana had suggested this and proceeded towards the courtyard with the plates containing the food she cooked.

In that direction was a circular wooden table with two wooden chairs. Originally this set was most likely used frequently during the warmer seasons. However, today was precisely as Liliana had

said, the temperature could be considered quite warm for the month of December. It seemed like there would be no issues eating here in the courtyard.

Afterwards, the dishes were set on the table.

There was bologna pasta, warm vegetable salad, a piping hot bean soup, as well as black tea stowed inside a thermos.

“Since I didn’t head out to buy anything, I felt quite unprepared . There is a possibility that it won’t be compatible with your tastes.. ....”

“I completely don’t get which of these dishes were unprepared for. Especially the pasta, it is very delicious.”

Godou felt that the notification Liliana gave in advance was unfathomable. The noodles and pâté were considerably rich in taste.

He actually thought they were those instantly made food products since Liliana rapidly made these dishes within ten minutes.

But the gratifying taste was actually created through diligent cooking and stewing for long periods of time.

“Actually, those noodles were prepared using the utmost simplicity since I only recooked yesterday's leftover beef stew with a few added seasonings. After that I just re-added some more minced meat.....”

On the contrary, Godou felt admiration towards Liliana after being informed that the cooking was simple.

This was the flavor of the dish wasn't it? By modifying the leftover food, a new delectable flavor was created. The amount of time and effort spent were both reduced. It indeed seemed quite reasonable.

Godou, who was a male in his teens, stuffed the food in his mouth as he wolfed down the cuisine personally prepared by Liliana.

Such actions were solely due to the delicious taste. Furthermore, he was eating face to face with Liliana, trying to find every possible way to hide his own embarrassment.

After he had his fill, he proposed to clean the dishes himself. However, he was actually denied from doing so.

Godou was unable to feel at ease when walking together with Liliana, who cleaned all the dishes herself, back to the living room. The pig on the top of the map had at one point stopped and laid there overturned.

Its abdomen was facing upward and it was trembling uncontrollably.

“It seems to have detected an upsurge in spiritual energy.”

Liliana spoke in a grave tone after looking at the hexagram images displayed from the magic she applied.

At that place was perhaps the next location where Santa Clauses devoid of red might appear.

The location was Odaiba——Today was nearing Christmas, that scenic gathering spot would without a doubt be filled with sweethearts.

“Well then, we should probably hurry over there and check it out."

Godou lowered his head in response to Liliana. This was probably expected from him.

In order to pursue the mystery of the gray Santa Claus, he had to journey to this scenic gathering spot together with an exceptionally attractive girl. Also it was still just the two of them. Godou felt inexplicably embarrassed toward this situation.

Part 4

They rode the JR tram to get to Odaiba.

After arriving at the location they would release the pig familiar allowing it to try to pursue the aura from the strange phenomenon.

This was the type of plan Godou and Liliana agreed on from inside the moving tram.

However, the situation surpassed their expectations; it transpired a long time ago and by then it had already concluded.

Facing the devil king and female knight who entered Odaiba, the culprit who initiated this disturbance had already called it quits.

The seaside that everyone was accustomed to had been created by using land reclamation. This area was now a very popular entertainment venue for gatherings and leisure.

Once they disembarked from the tram at Odaiba Marine Park station, Godou and Liliana trekked towards a nearby area that was brimming with liveliness. As expected, the number of large shopping centers designated for the young male and female visitors stretched as far as the eyes could see.

The strange phenomenon of Santa Clauses being greyified already manifested here. All the Santa Clauses located here were infected with the color grey. Their magnificent red color subsequently vanished.

Right now they had already lost the mood to confirm one by one whether or not all the Santa Clauses were greyified.

After Godou sent an eye signal towards her, Liliana retrieved the pig doll from her pocket. That familiar——was the so-called pig beast spirit of the earth.

Once the owner placed the doll on the ground, she began to recite spell words in a whisper.

"By the greed caused by the wild beast, go forth and pursue this suspicious aura!"

The pig seemed as if it was gliding along the surface as it moved.

In contrast to the time it was moving along the surface of the map, the movement speed at present was comparable to a nimble mouse. At the same time, Liliana closed her eyes and used the Witch's Eye to enable a vision transfer. The purpose behind doing this was to allow the Eye to follow behind the pig.

However, Godou believed this sort of method would not result in any important information. This incident will probably take some time to figure out. However——

"Kusanagi Godou…..I discovered something strange."

Liliana reported what she saw. Ten minutes had gone by after that.

Godou squeezed himself into a large crowd of people and noticed it as well. Using the pig that was pursuing the strange phenomenon as well as Liliana's Eyes, he was led to this location.

Within the meandering crowd of people——all of the normal humans were oblivious to that thing.

Even those who were directly facing this outlandishness were incapable of rationalizing the situation. This was because to ordinary people the best course of action would be to ignore it, hence the situation not being surprise worthy. However, Godou was perplexed.

That thing was walking amongst the crowd of people like an ordinary person.

The people within its vicinity were completely unaware of that thing's existence.

It resembled some aspects of a human figure. It was using two feet to walk, had two arms along with a head and torso.

In spite of that, the body was completely covered with what seemed to be a grey sailcloth. The underlying skin and face could not be seen at all.

“What is that? It doesn’t look like a god or divine beast.”

“Nor is it a magician. No matter how you associate it, it's impossible to classify it under the category of a human being. Perhaps it is a fairy or a spirit of some sort.”

Godou was flabbergasted as a result of Liliana's statement.

“In addition to gods, there are actually those kinds of guys roaming these grounds!?”

“It wouldn’t be on these grounds. They basically all reside within the Netherworld. Only in extremely rare circumstances would they go to the extent of coming to this side.”

Liliana fixed her eyes on the Grey One and paced around him while she spoke.

"It appears only Los Angeles's John Pluto Smith-sama has the capability to transfer to the Netherworld and summon the residents from there for a short period of time due to the authority he usurped from Oberon the fairy king."

"Speaking of which, that guy seemed to have done something like that in the past somewhere....."

Godou frowned after hearing the name of the North American Campione.

When did I encounter this guy before and what kind of things did we do?

"No matter what, let's first try to make contact with this grey colored guy. Conversing with it——accomplishing this would be great."

If the other member was a god, no matter what kind of appearance it had it would probably still be able to engage in conversation.

Well, there were certain times when traces of communication would feel very enigmatic.....However, no matter how you look at it, you would be skeptical whether it is even possible for the Grey One to engage in conversation.

Soon after, the Grey One left the crowd of people.

It was heading towards a lesser used coastal route. Was it planning to continue roaming at a different location? Up until that point, Godou and Liliana continued to close in on the Grey One.

After that, the target stopped in its tracks. It looked as if it was waiting for the two of them to come over.

Could they actually peacefully make contact with it?—— Just as Godou was looking forward to that possibility.....

The pursued target conducted a series of movements that was beyond all expectations. Slowly raising its right hand and spreading open its palm, a knife-hand gesture was prepared.

Then in one swift motion, the Grey One placed the knife-hand gesture next its neck and proceeded to chop its own neck off . What appeared to be the head portion of the sailcloth swirled into the air.

“Huh, did it actually commit suicide!?”

The two of them quickly accelerated their pace. The sailcloth covered body of the Grey One toppled forward.

Once they approached the corpse, Godou immediately peeled off the sailcloth. The insides were shaped to look exactly like a human body.

The physical body seemed to resemble a muscular and youthful person. However, it had a very black coloring.

Its pitch-black color gave the impression it was made of carbon while the texture of it resembled that of charcoal. Also, once it came in contact with the air, the charcoal-like body made a slight rustling noise as it crumbled like a collapsing sandcastle.

"The head portion over here also collapsed....."

On the other side, Liliana spoke while inspecting the neck of the Grey One who committed suicide by cutting its own throat.

She also ripped apart the sailcloth and looked inside——this should be the area where the head and face were.

"What the heck is this guy....."

The mysterious person who committed suicide was apparently a spirit of earth.

Facing this state of death, Godou was unable to comprehend the situation and was left feeling stumped.

"Neither a human nor a god, this existence, who was responsible for the annoying Santa Claus mystery, has now committed suicide——。It is really hard to understand this incident."

Amakasu muttered through the cellphone as he sighed in sorrow.

The grey sailcloth and bits of black ash plummeted down at the location where the suicide just took place.

"Upon normal inspection, the incident of Santa Clauses being greyified should consequently have ended..... I think this is the case. Well, I'll do a quick inspection of the situation. All in all I'm very thankful that the two of you were capable of supporting each other."

".....It seems like your inexplicably happy, am I right Amakasu Touma?"

"Of course I would be happy. It cannot get any better than having my workload lessened."

Amakasu replied to Liliana's slightly derisive question.

In short, the History Compilation Committee would take care of the job that dealt with the aftermath of an incident. Godou and Liliana originally held no responsibilities in regards to this aspect. They now have nothing left to do.

The two of them headed back in the direction of the large shopping centers for the time being.

"First hold on a sec."

After he first spoke to Liliana, Godou walked towards a crepe stand.

The food he bought used cooked apples mixed with cream, and then that was mixed with caramel and orange sauce.

Even though it was a pretty warm for a day in the middle of winter, however, this place was an area along the seaside.

It was quite chilly due to the winds blowing over from the sea. In that case it would be best to not order anything such as ice cream.

"Which kind do you want Liliana? Pick your favorite."

"What are you really up to? Today's cooperation toward this common goal was solely because it was the request of a Campione. I, Liliana Kranjcar, never planned on accepting a salary from you."

The female knight spoke with a look of appraisal. However, Godou calmly retorted.

"What are you going on about? Wasn't it Liliana herself that said I was someone who wasn't aware of my role as a king? As a result of that, my mindset had slightly changed."

"W-Why do you say that?"

"It is the duty of a king to give rewards to knights for their achievements. No need to thank me, just accept this ok?"

Godou declared this and handed two crepes in her direction.

This was really for accompanying him in exploration, and there was that lunch she made not too long ago etc. All the various things she did were included in this act of appreciation. However he should probably avoid saying it that sentimentally.

After being urged on in a slightly facetious manner, Liliana showed a bit of courtesy towards this which felt somewhat forced.

"If it's like this, then as a knight I'll just have to accept this."

When she finished speaking, Liliana acquired one of the crepes.

Just like that, the two of them began eating their crepes, making a crunching sound while they were doing so. Godou certainly did not have a sweet tooth, although he did not particularly detest desserts either.

However, the unforeseen location they were in at the moment made it impossible to calmly savor this kind of sweetness.

The reason was because his partner beside him was a silver-haired European girl. Furthermore she had a fairy-like ambience and was absolutely stunning, making her a particularly eye-catching girl.

She appeared to stand out even in Odaiba where there were a myriad of young girls.

He had already noticed it while eating along the way. Even though they were acting naturally, people from the crowd that circulated through here gathered an interest in them.

Having said that, Liliana on the other hand looked like she was oblivious to the attention they were receiving. She was completely composed like there was nothing out of the ordinary. There was the fear she might think the reason for the attention was due to her being an outsider.

The difference between her and Erica, who acknowledged her own beauty, was astounding.

In any case, he was sure to be seen as her boyfriend by other people because he was alongside her.....Kusanagi Godou didn't believe he had the capability to hook up with someone that had the looks and tolerance of Liliana.

Godou contemplated on whether or not to say something after they finished eating.

'Well then, I should probably be going now. Thank you for all that you have done today——' these were the kind of words he thought about saying.

This was probably the proper and correct way to go about this. Since he lived nearby there shouldn't be any problems riding the same tram back with her. Although if he wanted to prolong their time together there were numerous reasons he could come up with .....

At that moment, a pair of lovers walked by right in front them.

The man and woman looked like they were young college students. The female student was carrying a massive yet adorable teddy bear in her arms. The dimensions of that teddy bear made it impossible to carry with two hands.

Was it bought in some kind of doll store?

As he pondered on the thought, he unintentionally noticed the store that the couple exited from. It was an enormous video game center.

".....It appears to be the same facility we went to before."

Liliana suddenly mentioned this as Godou had just finished eating his crepe.

"Well, that is because this is a popular chain of arcades. The place we went to before is of the same type."

"In other words, this place also has the opportunity to go hunting. In addition to that, the teddy bear that we just saw was a humongous toy. I don't have that category of children inside my bedroom....."

The way she muttered was as if she thought of some sort of plan. Liliana was one of those types of girls who would call her doll related objects as her children. Godou nodded his head, and while purposefully using an uninterested tone, he said:

"I'm not sure if it is a prize from the video game center. If it is, something that big would probably be set-up to be difficult to obtain."

Even though Godou was unfamiliar with what goes on within the industry, it was very likely that this was the case.

"Even with the money spent on buying it from the store you might still be unable to obtain it. We might as well just head home directly for today."

"No matter what kind of situation it is you must find a method to secure victory. Your suggestion is really quite negative."

Liliana spoke in a manner that slightly ridiculed him.

She also cleared her throat with a cough and went to say with a hint of embarrassment:

"I regret to say that I, Liliana Kranjcar, am not quite familiar on the sure win methods and how to conduct myself in a place like this. I wish to have a senior that possesses the corresponding knowledge to guide me for a bit."

What an exaggerated way of speaking, it pretty much meant: " would you like to go to the arcade".

This invitation caused Godou to hesitate.

"Even if I had the knowledge and such as you said, I don't really go to these kinds of places. Nanami and Sorimachi from our class look like they would be somewhat familiar in this aspect."

There was a difference between large scale games, free games, and PC games.

It could be said that Godou's knowledge on these topics were quite vague. As a result, this was a perfectly normal way to decline

someone. It was basically the natural course of action to this situation right?

However, Liliana did not back down one bit to this degree of suppression. She chuckled and said:

"Then it should just take about ten minutes total. Furthermore, my compensation isn't some kind of cheap object that can be paid off completely with just one crepe."

In the end, the event that was predetermined to be ten minutes prolonged to forty minutes. Plus, speaking of the results——.

"We still weren't able to nab that big one."

Godou stated this after exiting the arcade.

There were four sets of doll grabbing machines that were equipped with the teddy bear prize within this arcade. Furthermore, there was a difference in their dimensions. There were extremely small ones like the size of a cellphone strap, small ones that you could fit on your palm, medium sized ones about as big as a football, and lastly there was the exceptionally large kind that the pair of lovers were holding onto just then.

The largest item, being the highest benchmark, was of course the one Liliana set her eyes on as her prey. However, the claw's strength was particularly weak so no matter what you did it was unable to grab the toy.

Godou even lent her a hand but it was completely useless.

It was quite admirable how those pair of lovers were capable of acquiring it so easily.

After expending a large amount pocket change and time, the two of them finally gave up. Even though they were only passing by, if only they were able to obtain it, then——.

"Well, the couple who were able to seize it could be considered quite capable."

Although the inside of the store had become quite warm, at that moment, Liliana still spoke with a calm expression.

She was holding onto two bear cellphone straps. These bear straps actually had a male version and a female version that were modeled slightly differently. The female one had a ribbon as well as a very gentle expression.

Incidentally, Godou vulgarly called them 'male and female' and was forced to correct himself by his partner.

".....Oh yeah, you can have the one over here."

Liliana suddenly handed him a cellphone strap.

It was the male, no, the boy bear one. Godou was confused.

"Are you sure? You went through a lot of trouble to gather a boy and girl pair."

"Yeah. The boy and girl pair is like a pair of lovebirds on the same branch. They probably shouldn't be separated."

Liliana stated her beliefs using a firm choice of words.

"However, I also want to share these with you. Although I don't know why I'm compelled to think this way, in fact it is quite unimaginable.....How about this is just to commemorate today?"

The female knight's face suddenly blossomed with brilliance as a warm smile surfaced upon her lips.

Perhaps because of this, Godou carefully accepted the boy bear. Honestly speaking, even he was uncertain what the reason was. He thought it would be fine as long as he treated the situation with caution.

However, because it was a small fictional object, it would really make people feel a tad embarrassed.

"If this cellphone strap were to become mine then it would be a bit.....well, just allow me accept it for now. Perhaps at a later date I 'll just give it to my sister…..oh, I think that most likely won't occur."

"How you handle the item you received is your liberty. If you really decide to do that, I would have to change my relation to this Kusanagi Godou person."

Liliana sighed as they walked side by side towards the station.

In the end, they stayed together all the way until they reached Nezu.

Chapter 3 - A Request Made to the Hime-Miko

Part 1

During the night of the visit to Odaiba, Godou was finally able to start reading his textbook.

The final exams for the second semester were already over. However, Kusanagi Godou's test scores have slowly declined from their usual high marks.

Well, he had been entangled by an incident involving a god-sama and was involved with numerous things.

Although he could say it was simply due to a lack of preparation, he was not only a godslayer and demon king, but was also a high school student. As such, he should remain focused on his studies.

Especially during the month after winter break when the all-important aptitude tests took place in Jounan Academy.

For that reason, Godou displayed diligence as he opened the textbook and began taking notes on the table within the room.

"Eh? Speaking of which, did I get into a battle with a certain god before the final exams?"

He was suddenly a bit concerned about this matter in which he had forgotten.

It was now the second day. After the half curriculum of classes prior to winter break were over, Godou walked towards the library. He was situated in a quiet place where he could study the contents of the second semester. If he ever got tired of studying he could always find a book to kill time. However, time was of the essence since he must return before the sky darkens.

——Actually, starting yesterday he was responsible for cooking.

In the Kusanagi household when their grandfather was absent, Godou and Shizuka would alternate the responsibility of cooking every couple of days.

Lunches were to be prepared individually while the person on shift would do both breakfast and dinner. Once Godou came home he walked towards the kitchen.

(Also, the schedule of shifts of course did not include their mother. Even though one of the reasons was because she was rarely home for dinner, the most significant cause for this was because she was their mother.)

Today Godou planned on cooking with a pan which he filled with an abundance of vegetables, pork and afterwards he liberally (but in good proportion) added pickled cabbages.

The ingredients were cut and the time was also set on the rice cooker.

Once that was all taken care of, Godou glanced at his cellphone that was set aside and noticed a text message.

"Who sent this?"

Godou, who didn't seem too interested, went to quickly check its content. He then shook his head, completely unable to fathom what it was.

Not only did the email omit the name of the sender, but the email address was unfamiliar to Godou.

The contents of the email were 'Progress report, concerning the incident from the past, the resurrection will take place during the winter solstice, please be careful, Ying.'

At the moment it seemed like a warning, but it was overly simplified.

The report seemed like it was sent in passing by a staff member who had infiltrated the dangerous enemy ranks and began monitoring the enemy.

"The winter solstice mentioned probably refers to the day of the year where the night is at its longest."

The day of the year where the night is at its longest, in other words the day when the earth is furthest from the sun.

A very popular Japanese tradition was to take a hot yuzu bath and eat pumpkins[6] every year during the 21st or 22nd of December.

This year's winter solstice should betide on the 22nd of December. Incidentally today was December 19th. Seems like the revival will take place in three days.....

"But who the heck is Ying and what is this revival?"

Godou was currently contemplating over this. Revival——just what is being revived?

Godou tried to search for an answer within his mind but was unable to come up with anything. If it is not something he can remember then it probably lacked importance. Perhaps it will be fine even if he forgot?

"However, during that time with the Santa Clauses we saw someone strange during the investigation."

Godou immediately changed his train of thought. However, who should he request for help?

Should he request Liliana again, or Amakasu? Neither of them would probably be applicable. When all was said and done, one ambivalent keyword came to mind. If only there was someone here who possessed clairvoyance, then it may be possible to obtain an answer.....

No, wait a second. Someone who possesses clairvoyance, isn't that person nearby?!

After eating dinner with Shizuka and cleaning up, Godou returned to his room.

The room was really an eyesore. The Japanese-style six tatami room contained a desk and chair, a Japanese-style wardrobe as well as a bookcase. Anything that there was no room for was shoved in.

As a result, Godou's room was very concise.

He did not possess any unnecessary items, which gave a plain lifestyle feeling. Nevertheless, he still had items that were an eyesore.

The reason for this was due to him not having the temperament to be storing things, hence this was to be expected. Besides the desirables and necessities, he would not mind doing away with everything else if he had to.

——He would feel irritated if a large quantity of things were brought in.

——Only the minimum requirement of a necessity will do. This arrangement was much more lightweight, relaxed, and spacey.

So contrary to what one might expect, Godou was really fond of this sort of profoundly plain room.

"Is my room really that lonely?"

He was referring to something besides the contents within the room. It felt like this place used to be filled with something, something very lively——.

While suddenly incurring this kind of feeling, Godou sensed something was missing.

Many things that were desperately needed were now lost..... this was the kind of feeling that surfaced in Godou. An indescribable feeling of being lost and forlornness sank into him.

"As expected, there is something that I can't piece together..... plus the relationship I have with those people hasn't really improved."

There were a lot of suspenseful matters regarding the girls by his side and their interpersonal relationships. Even though the distance between him and Liliana has curtailed quite a bit, it would be meaningless if he was unable to further deepen their relationship.

His relationship with Erica was still the status quo. Also that girl seldom attended school and was as cunning as always. And then there was Yuri——.

Not only did she have clairvoyance, she was someone who had the ability to use Spirit Vision as well.

In this aspect, not only did she surpass Liliana, she also transcended Princess Alice.

"At the present, I would say Mariya Yuri's assistance is the most essential."

But how should he request help from Yuri, the sheltered Yamato Nadeshiko?

She was someone who would evade getting into a discussion, an inconversable hime-miko.

“Eh? It’s like that?”

Godou felt a little uneasy. Yuri was indeed a highly ranked girl. Not only was she courteous by virtue, she was also conservatively polite. She was very passive towards making contact with boys making her unreachable.

However there seemed to be a completely different side of her. Indeed, it was like the gentleness of Guanyin Buddha[7] who provided help to all living things combined with the indignant nature of an Acala[8] reincarnation.

“I’ll give it a try and see what happens.....”

This kind of thinking was imprudent, parallel to some sort of evil thought.

Godou appeared to have abandoned this kind of thinking as he shook his head. No matter how he tried to play it off as a joke, the words of a Campione would never appear as an antic.

But this was perhaps an opportunity for him to alter his relationship with Yuri.

After spending two minutes stressing over this, Godou picked up the phone and sent out a text message. A response should appear tomorrow morning at the earliest.

"If I don't take any risks then there is no way to move forward. Did a certain supervisor say something like that in the past?"

Because he was incapable of openly stating his beliefs, Godou had entered a tiger's cave.

When the night passed, it was December 20th.

Just as before, it was Godou's responsibility to cook for the Kusanagi household in the morning.

The first was miso soup, which is made by pouring miso into hot water and boiling it into a soup, then adding potatoes to complete the soup. The prewashed rice was then placed in the rice cooker for it to be cooked in an environmentally friendly system using the least amount of labor. Cucumbers, eggplants, and pickled radishes were also soaked together for fifteen minutes.

"Afterwards I should probably cook some vegetables."

"All you did was place the cut up vegetables in the steamer on the kitchen stove for five minutes. You speak as if you are actually cooking Onii-chan."

"What does it matter, it may be simple but at least it's very nutritious."

Godou was trying to comfort his sister while opening the door to the fridge.

He took out some nattō[9], raw eggs, and nori and placed them on the kitchen table. After that, he presented it like a western-style buffet. These dishes should be enough between the two siblings.

.....The older brother lazily made the food, however the chef for the Kusanagi household was absent so there was no other alternative.

“Onii-chan, it’s clear that you serve decent dishes while occasionally cooking, but once you start cooking on a daily basis you begin to slack off. ”

“But this is the case for the majority of skilled cooks.”

“Even if those skilled cooks cut corners, they would still be able to create excellent dishes. However in Onii-chan’s case, you are already putting in minimum effort before you reach the stage where corners should be cut!

Because he was reminded of Liliana’s culinary skills, he stated in the following manner. However his sister had actually counterattacked.

At this time the doorbell to the front door sounded. Has she arrived?

“Who would be here this early?”

Shizuka stood up and walked towards the front door while Godou continued eating. Perhaps his mind was entangled by doubt. After Shizuka opened the front door, a beautiful girl wearing her uniform came into view.

"M-Mariya-senpai!?"

That said, the two girls had an upperclassmen-underclassmen relationship in the tea ceremony club.

Mariya Yuri elegantly lowered her head and spoke towards the startled underclassmen.

"I'm very sorry for disturbing you guys this early in the morning, but I have some urgent matters to discuss with your brother. Please forgive my rudeness."

"Brother.....you mean my Onii-chan!?"

"Yes, would it be possible for me to accompany Kusanagi-san for a bit?"

She was directly looking at Kusanagi Godou who was standing behind Shizuka.

Mariya Yuri had a stern and serious expression comparable to when a noble princess adjudicates over sinners.

Regarding the godslaying devil king as an adversary, she casted an intense seriousness that was much different than the highly ranked girl's usual cautiousness. Godou felt his intuition was correct.

This turned the originally conservative Yuri into a courageous, initiative taking girl.

He had successfully coerced her!

However why did he have this feeling like he overdid it? There was the saying you can't catch a cub without going into the tiger's den, but it felt like there was a point where he had proudly stepped on the tiger's tail.....

The price of wanting to control the situation for himself felt like it had spiraled beyond his expectation.

Since it is like this, he might as well keep her company. Godou braced himself and responded to the princess's calling.

Part 2

Godou terminated his plans of eating together with Shizuka and decided to save his breakfast in order to eat it at night.

Fortunately clothing for him was not an issue. Godou put on the shirt from his school uniform and a coat, then immediately left after picking up his backpack.

However, Shizuka's tone on the other hand had a mix of anger (I wonder why?) and bewilderment.

"O-Onii-chan, quit provoking other people. What did you do to make Mariya-senpai actually come to our house!? Could it be the blood inherited from grandpa has finally awakened!? Afterwards you better explain everything clearly to me!"

T-There was no easy way to explain this, so might as well use a bit of deception right?

The brother who was carrying these immoral feeling went towards the front door and spoke to the hime-miko waiting for him.

"Sorry for making you wait."

"No, it was me who first disturbed you without permission and I came off very adamant. This sort of delay isn't a concern at all."

After respectfully replying, Yuri started walking together with Godou by her side.

That said, if the words she had used were elegantly and respectfully spoken like they had always been in the past, the words would have sent a warm feeling to Godou's heart. This was because the maiden by his side was both adorable and stunning, thus making him feel embarrassed.

However, the tone she used right now was filled with the dignity of a queen of winter.

Just when they happened to leave Nezu Sanchome's business street, the might of this dignified feeling became much more powerful.

"Well then Kusanagi Godou, what was the reason for yesterday 's text message?"

Godou flinched after being suddenly questioned.

Perhaps he was unable to speak about his aroused battle spirit caused by various circumstances?

"It's nothing, just a few things I recently remembered....."

"No matter what position you hold, you still shouldn't do anything like this!"

Yuri took out her cellphone and displayed the contents of the text sent yesterday towards Godou.

Subject: Some matters we need to consult

'Today there was someone who sought to discuss some matters with me. It seemed that he felt very anxious because he was being tracked by a deity. Since my abilities were applicable, I replied ' then let's eliminate this god'. After that, the god came looking to quarrel with me, making me feel somewhat distressed. Once I crush that god, would it be better if he was submerged in Tokyo Bay or the Suruga Bay?'

It seems Yuri's high class temperament and her hime-miko duties were provoked.

Godou accurately anticipated this and purposefully sent her a message that would give her headaches by instilling apprehensive thoughts. He was successful on his first attempt. As expected, Yuri was more than just a kindhearted girl.

She was also strong-willed, noble, and had a habit of preaching and nagging others.

Even though he cowered in fear from her aggressive attitude, Godou did have a strong sense of satisfaction. It would be contradictory to Mariya's nature if things did not turn out like this.

"You intentionally brought the heretic god into Japan and now you intend to cause mass destruction once again!? Your concern for the surrounding area is completely inadequate!"

"W-Wait a second, Mariya."

Godou replied, unable to resist anymore.

"Everything in that text was a lie."

"A lie?"

"Ah, haha, I only did that because it was necessary."

Following that, Yuri suddenly displayed a smile that was clearly very charming. Nevertheless, it was a smile that would insinuate fear into anyone. This was an expression of regret showcased by the beautiful princess.

"Why must you do something like this?"

"No, you see, there never is an opportunity for me to talk to Mariya right? We are only able to have a proper conversation if I did something like this."

Although he mentioned some pretty bizarre things, there was nothing else that could have been done.

Godou lowered his head with dignity and spoke his heartfelt feelings with determination.

"I felt like if I tried to casually converse with you, you would evade my attempts."

"So it's like that? Just now I was contemplating whether or not to cut off all connections to the lying and irresponsible Kusanagi-san forever."

The hime-miko declared this with a cold smile. That compelling force of hers had also increased.

However, Godou immediately followed up by yelling "Mariya" and closed in greatly. The distance between Godou and Yuri was practically nonexistent as Godou looked straight into her eyes. In the past, whenever a beautiful girl approached him, he would cower and be incapable of doing anything.

"Ku-Kusanagi-san!?"

"I will apologize as much as you want me to for lying, but please listen to me this one time."

Godou said this with the highest level of sincerity.

"This is an unreasonable request of mine, but rather than having Mariya treat me courteously, I would heavily prefer you to show anger and criticize me without anguish. Even if you feel uncomfortable, you should still continue to conduct yourself as such."

"....."

"If possible, I hope you would scold me whenever I do something unacceptable in the future like you are doing right now. Basically me and that idiot Salvatore Doni both need a person of this sort."

A devil king is someone who is permitted to be unreasonably violent and live an indulgent lifestyle that allows them to ignore other people's liberties. Someone who possesses powers of a Campione should not be saying these things to a mere human.

"So if someone must be selected, I hope that person would be you Mariya. Of course, if Mariya doesn't want to then I won't force you.....What do you think?"

"Kusanagi-sa——Godou-san....."

Suddenly, Yuri quietly stated Godou's name.

This was really unfathomable since it was obviously an offensive change. However, Godou was not surprised with this new way of being addressed. Instead, it could be said that this

label was familiar sounding or rather, it was something he was accustomed to.

Afterwards Yuri silently followed in kind with her head lowered like Godou. Her entire face turned red as she was probably very embarrassed.

At this time Godou finally noticed it, his proximity with Yuri was extremely close. If his face was any closer it would be within kissing distance. They resembled lovers preparing to embrace each other.

However, Yuri finally seemed to have responded with a nod.

This made Godou feel ecstatic. The beautiful hime-miko, who was flustered because of the close distance and wished to have some separation, suddenly spoke in a whisper.

“Anything that the King——No, if it is Godou-san’s wish then I will try my best in response. However, I have something that I want to say about this."

Godou’s back broke out in a cold sweat as sensed an omen of danger.

Surely enough, Yuri suddenly sighed and held a sorrowful expression while looking up at Godou.

“I didn’t think Godou-san was lying.”

“Eh!?”

"I don't know why I would wishfully think that Godou would always be sincere to me. Calmly thinking about it, there are clearly many strange aspects to this. Nevertheless I still unconditionally trust you."

Yuri's murmur was not of criticism but rather of sorrow.

Her serene and grieving expression instead greatly provoked Godou's sense of guilt.

"R-Regarding this, please allow me to once again apologize....."

"To earn a person's trust takes many years to accumulate, however losing trust in a person only takes a swift moment.....I feel that what Godou-san has done this time should reflect what I have just said."

"I'll do anything for forgiveness. Kneeling down, anything would be fine."

This kind of uncomfortable situation was akin to being reprimanded.

Deeply experienced, Godou did not hesitate when offering the highest level method of forgiveness seeking. He immediately utilized a prized technique passed down within the family and knelt along the road. As a result, Yuri's lonesome expression turned into a smile.

"It would have been fine even if you didn't do anything to this degree. I only desired to have Godou experience the same feeling that I just experienced....."

Just like that she stopped him in his tracks. Godou pondered while maintaining his kneeling position.

Phew, I'll never lie to Mariya again——. Furthermore.

"S-Sawa-san, did you hear that.....!? Mariya-san and.....class five's Kusanagi-san? The two of them seemed to have said staying by each other's side, is that a joke? Or could it be....."

"Of course, it's just as Miyama-san thought, this is virtually the same kind of conversation a married couple would have as they overcome a divorce crisis. This means....."

"Not only were Kusanagi-san and Mariya-san dating, he even had an affair.....!?"

"A guy like this is actually in our school. Class five's Kusanagi, I 'm on to you!"

Godou heard this unfortunate intermittent whispering. Looking to his side, there were two girl students who appeared to be from Yuri's class located not too far away from them. The one with the glasses was Sawa-san, the petite one was Miyama-san.

Speaking of which, he would trek through here on a daily basis. Moreover, it was the only way to get to Jounan Academy.

Other than Sawa-san and Miyama-san, there were a couple students staring at them from a bit farther away! Sensing this dangerous situation, Godou spoke without hesitation.

"Mariya! Come over here!"

"O-Ok!"

Unwittingly, they went to the entrance of the Nezu Shrine. A hurried decision was made when selecting the shrine's courtyard as refuge, prompting Godou and Yuri to enter inside.

Part 3

Godou and Yuri ran towards the vast courtyard in the Nezu Shrine.

Five minutes had already passed since that previous scene. It was unclear exactly when it happened, but the atmosphere between the two of them had became tranquil and the mood strangely turned very positive.

Godou discreetly tilted his head, just now he was clearly conflicted by his own lie.

Moreover it was tantamount to yesterday morning. Godou and Yuri evidently had nothing to say, but their line of sight suddenly crossed paths. Yuri candidly lowered her head and gracefully smiled. Considering Godou had said some outlandish things, this approach was appropriate.

The taut atmosphere from before seemed like it was merely a farce.

"Godou-san, I actually noticed this prior to now."

Yuri suddenly started talking as she casually walked in a uniform posture.

"I noticed that I.....no, we, forgot something very important."

"You too Mariya!?"

Godou was absolutely astounded. Could it be that Mariya's situation was the same?

"Recently, I have been unable to remain at peace because I feel like I've forgotten something important. It repeatedly felt like there was some sort of prearranged plan around Christmas "

"Christmas?"

"Ah, there was also the text I received from a person that I supposedly know which said something was going to be revived during the winter solstice and that I should be careful. It was full of some vague matters that would make anyone feel very confused ."

The purpose of the unspecified delivery address was probably to prevent the identity of the sender from being discovered. However, up until now there was still no response and the intention to respond probably never existed.

However, back to the main topic——Godou thought of something while Yuri was talking. At this time, there seems to be someone who can fill in the blanks for Kusanagi Godou.

Just like Yuri, there also seems to be some sort of other person——. Letting her cover his back and fighting side by side, sometimes she would bicker while other times she would share opinions and offer advice. Occasionally she would create complications that would drive people crazy. However, they would also hang out together at times. What other instances would there have to be in order for her to be a suitable partner?

Godou desperately reflected upon this bleary memory of his.

However this was insufficient, it was still inadequate. If only there was some kind of opportunity.....!

Afterwards, Godou heard Yuri mention a divine revelation.

"Ever since ancient times, the winter solstice has always been an important sacrificial day for welcoming the god of bountiful harvests. The people express gratitude for the bumper harvest in the fall and feel very joyous towards the arrival of the winter solstice. Furthermore, they celebrate the coming of spring and request the omnipotent to start storing power."

——!? Godou looked to his side while Yuri gazed at Godou with a dazed expression.

"What's wrong Godou-san?"

Just then, did she use her spirit vision to obtain that divine revelation? How typical of her.

Under situations which lacked awareness of the circumstances, her ability would oftentimes be able to grant useful declarations. Even in this condition where the situation was unclear, as long as they had her power then——.

Like having discovered a beacon illuminating the road ahead, Godou heavily nodded.

He felt that the suspended hands of a clock have now clicked and once again started to move at an uptempo.

In the end, Godou and Yuri arrived at the school together.

Walking together within the school is still too great of a difficulty. This was why the two of them separated at the shoe cabinet located at the front doors of the school and headed to their respective classes.

Tomorrow was already going to be the graduation ceremony and the day after on the 22nd was the start of winter break. Due to this, a complacent atmosphere was found within the school. Classes were going to end soon and all the teachers and students within the school were cleaning——sort of like a mass cleanup. It was probably influenced by this kind of atmosphere. Speaking of which, today Erica showed up.

She appeared to be in charge of the cleanup group for the science room. She quickly brought some people who were

students that in the same class as her and who had a pretty good relationship with her to go with. Of course for Erica, displaying her own hard working attitude would probably be implementing effective commands to instruct other people to quickly finish cleaning.....

By the way, Godou was part of the hallway cleanup group while Liliana was part of her class——class five's cleanup group.

When Godou would occasionally enter the classroom, he felt as if the silver-haired knight was eyeing him with criticism.

But he bypassed the notion that she was concentrating on him. Believing he was just overthinking this, Godou focused on his cleaning.

Once they finally finished cleaning, it was time to head home. While Godou was preparing to leave, the group of three consisting of Nanami, Sorimachi, and Takagi approached him.

"Hey Kusanagi, you always seem to be involved in these strange rumors."

"Although I think it's just a joke, I should still do a quick confirmation. You and Mariya-san——this matter regarding the socialization with the overwhelmingly top ranked girl of the Nadeshiko section in my school, was it true?"

"F-Furthermore even though you guys already arranged plans for marriage, Mariya was depressed because you had an affair!"

Godou frowned and muttered “huh?”.

“Although I know where this kind of silly rumor came from..... there has to be a limit on circumventing the truth. If lies like these were spread around, it would create complications for me and Mariya.”

The indignant Godou said this while in a sour mood.

Afterwards, the three idiots suddenly nodded their heads and displayed a smile on their faces.

“Ha ha ha, I guess you are right.”

“I just knew that you and Mariya-san becoming a couple had to be a joke.”

“There is eye-witness information saying you two were arguing on the way to school. However the result was that you guys happily arrived at school walking side by side after reconciling. This kind of strange information was broadcasted everywhere and we unwittingly came across this unconfirmed report which instigated some suspicion towards you.”

“Ah, no, the arguing and coming to school together was true.”

“””What...Did...You...Say!?”””

After Godou announced this fact, the expression of the three idiots changed for some reason.

"The person telling this kind of nonsense was probably someone at the location and witnessed me and Mariya quarreling. However, the relationship is definitely not the same as what they said, I'm serious.——Oh yeah, there is something I want to request from Nanami."

Godou spoke to his startled friend who had a frozen expression.

"It's pretty tough to complete that game I borrowed from before , is it ok if I continue borrowing it?"

"U-Uh huh. It would be fine even if you borrowed it for a year or two as long as you put your heart into it as you play. But Kusanagi, the things you just said.....can we believe in them?"

"Huh?"

"What he means is, we still have faith in you——as our comrade, being one of the men who gallantly fights in solitude during Christmas against an empty reality, how could we not believe!?"

"No, I don't have any plans to battle anyone during Christmas, none at all.....?"

Having no plans, for some reason he hesitated right after he finished speaking. It seemed as if he had the feeling that something was awaiting him.

Part 4

Afterwards, on the way back home, Godou headed towards the supermarket.

The purpose of this was to carry out the obligations of his cooking responsibilities. For lunch, he simply tended to that by eating an onigiri bought from a convenience store.

Ok then, what should I eat for tonight? I could eat the leftovers from this morning, but that will definitely not be enough. I have a lot of free time right now compared to my busy morning.

While Godou started to reflect on the few dishes he could adeptly cook, one problem came to mind. After considering this matter, tonight's dinner menu had to be prudently selected. How should he go about doing this?

In the vegetable aisle of the supermarket, the perplexed Godou heard a voice.

"I happened to notice that you are doing something rarely seen from you in a place you infrequently visit."

Godou looked back and saw Liliana standing there wearing her uniform and holding a backpack. She probably just departed from school as well.

"I hardly ever see you shopping in these kinds of stores."

"Grandpa isn't here right now and today is my responsibility to prepare dinner. Did Liliana come here to go shopping as well?"

When Liliana's maid Karen was on vacation in her home country, it would not be strange to see Liliana going shopping by herself. However she responded by shaking her head.

"No, I actually wanted to confirm something so that is why I came here to see you."

"Confirm?"

"I heard you ruthlessly plucked the Japanese hime-miko Mariya Yuri and made her your possession. Furthermore, you even had an affair and abandoned her. What is this all about?"

"P-Plucked?"

Godou stared blankly at Liliana who suddenly started talking incessantly.

"This is the only time where I won't assess you as wrong. Mhmm, no matter how negligent you are on the battlefield like a monster, you are always appropriately conscientious during everyday life."

"A-Appropriately?"

"At best considered a person who became accustomed to living in society, yet still retaining a rather flawed notion of common sense——this kind of person not only possesses many traits that cause other people complications but is also someone who pulls one's punches. This is exactly how I feel!"

"Is this how you see me Liliana.....?"

"However, the actions you did towards Mariya Yuri were indeed too excessive. Unlike a gentleman, you lack the proper morality of a human being. I was really wrong about you."

"No, although I can assume where you heard this kind of rumor from."

Godou used an indifferent tone to express his opinion to the aggressive Liliana.

"You probably should've diligently double-checked this rumor against the facts before coming to find me. How about you try giving a call to Mariya, she will definitely refute this claim and say there is no truth behind it."

"Eh.....?"

Suddenly, Liliana's imposing manner waned as she sank deep into thought. After contemplating this over, she displayed a "oh crap" kind of expression.

"Well, let me ask you again, Liliana did you come here to go shopping?"

"J-Just forget about everything regarding this matter Kusanagi Godou."

Liliana let out a sigh as she spoke.

The red-faced Liliana pretty much reverted back to her serious demeanor.

"I'm sorry, after hearing the rumor, for some reason this kind of 'Kusanagi Godou likes feminine charms and carelessly establishes relationships with other girls very quickly' impression surfaced and I very naturally believed this rumor."

"You were probably going off baseless facts!"

In the end the two of them selected the ingredients together. To some degree, this scene involving a devil king and knight selecting ingredients in the fresh food section could be considered as some sort of parody.

"Going beyond that explanation, it's time to worry about tonight's menu."

"Buy cheap ingredients that are exceptionally discounted. Using those to cook dishes should be fine, right?"

Godou shook his head in response to the prevailing method Liliana offered.

"In fact, I did that yesterday as well as the day before. Don't you think that conveniently cutting meat, fish, vegetables, and putting them all in a pot would be a very easy way to make them delicious? The tastes of most types of foods are acceptable just by doing some minor cooking.....I would think" said Godou.

However, while he still had more to say, an inconceivable feeling developed within him.

"As a result, two days ago I made chanko and saved the leftovers to simmer in udon for yesterday's breakfast. After that, while I was making pickled cabbages yesterday night Shizuka started to become agitated. So for this morning, I guess you can say the things I made were more cuisine-like."

Once he recalled the expression of dissatisfaction on his sister again, Godou became irritated.

He thought, how annoying can a girl get.

"So tonight's menu has to be selected carefully. However, because I'm unsure what kind of dishes are acceptable to a little girl I'm feeling quite distressed."

Liliana sighed for some reason.

Godou cringed. He felt his counterpart wanted to say "you are a person who always needs someone else to take care of you".

"Overall, I think I understand that you are definitely a loser instead of a winner in this domestic life battlefield."

Godou cowered at this criticism that he was completely unable to refute.

"This is why I suggested the appointment of a butler and maid."

"Whether it is yesterday or today, I will most likely never arrange such a thing. Well, let's just say I will not approve of this even beyond five years from now."

"Then that exhausts all your options. Looks like you need a charitable counterpart."

The moment he heard this, Godou blinked repeatedly in surprise.

Liliana said charitable? Does that mean——.

Afterwards, an hour had passed.

The silhouette of the fairy-like silver-haired European beauty could be seen skillfully making dishes at the Kusanagi household.

Taking the cut up pieces of white radish, cucumbers, carrots, celery, etc. she turned the components into a salad and included some cream and cheese as dessert.

Furthermore there were crunchy deep fried pumpkins, fried sweet potatoes, fried lotus roots, and egg rolls made out of shrimp and avocado.

She was able to create many vegetable and meat dishes in a concise amount of time. Plus, she took Godou's leftover miso soup from earlier this morning and added it to the curry powder. Following that, other ingredients such as bacon, lettuce, tomato,

and so on were included. The result was the creation of a BLT (the abbreviation stands for Bacon, Lettuce, Tomato) soup that tasted like curry.

When seeing those ingredients amassed together, at the time there was a certain curiosity as to what it was going to be morphed into.

After giving it a quick taste, a brilliantly created Western style flavor could be detected. As expected, the workmanship could only be considered admirable if this kind of sensation was induced to others.

"I'm very sorry that these are only some casually made food."

After finishing her cooking, Liliana apologized.

"At the very least I do believe my cooking isn't as atrocious as yours."

"I guess so.....it definitely felt like the workload didn't really change."

"I'm afraid you carry an 'as long as it is edible it is fine' kind of attitude while haphazardly cooking. However, I believe the art of cooking parallel to romance, some degree of passion is still needed ."

"Uh....."

While criticizing Godou's careless nature, Liliana appeared to have become a fearless speaker.

This was probably self-inflicted. Godou cringed as a result.

"O-Overall you really helped me out a great deal, thank you. If it's not too much trouble, would you like to also stay here for dinner Liliana?"

"I don't have any plans for today.....but disturbing your family gathering is not ideal, please forgive my refusal."

Liliana used the perfect excuse to decline Godou's invitation.

Well, there will always be some conflict no matter how many times a person suddenly eats at someone else's house. In fact, the level of Godou and Liliana's relationship was also inadequate..

Godou thought about this while nodding. However, he was really incapable of comprehending this situation. For some reason, seeing Liliana stand in the kitchen of his house made him feel nostalgic. She was wearing a uniform and a scarf, using a kitchen knife, while lighting the fire on the stove——.

Nevertheless, it was quite unimaginable as to how the European beauty felt at home in an aged Japanese house that was unsuited for her. She assimilated to the setting of the Kusanagi household, making Godou feel very nostalgic.

"Oh yeah, Liliana, this is your first time coming to my house..... right?"

"Eh? Yeah.....it should be, ah, no——eh?"

Liliana tilted her head and looked completely puzzled by Godou's inquiry.

"Today is certainly the first time, I think?"

"I also feel that is the case....."

The two of them were facing one another with their expressions aligned as they were pondering.

Although this should be the case, something feels very suspicious. Burdened with doubt, Godou looked directly at Liliana who possessed a pure and beautiful complexion. Afterwards, Liliana shyly casted down her eyes and nervously looked around the kitchen.

"P-Please don't look at me like this, it'll make me feel very embarrassed....."

"I-I'm sorry. I don't mean it like that."

The flustered silver-haired beauty moved away from his line of sight. Seemingly wanting to change the subject, Liliana decided to speak up.

"Kusanagi Godou, you haven't really tidied up these past couple of days have you? There is a dirt stain in the corner."

"Ah.....I did remember contemplating wanting to straighten up the place a few times."

"Still as carefree as ever. I understand now, coming to disturb you today could be considered as fate's doing to bring us together."

Liliana suddenly went to the hallway, opened the storage room, and took out the vacuum that was placed in there as well as a duster and cleaning rag.

She was promptly on the move as if she knew in advance where the cleaning tools were.

"Ah, I didn't intend to impress you with cleaning duties too!"

"Don't worry about it, the longer someone sees the stains in this house the more disgusted they would feel."

As soon as she finished speaking, Liliana swiftly commenced cleaning.

She first tidied up the things scattered along the hallway, bed and so on. Afterwards, it was of course time for the vacuum and duster to take the stage. They could reach places to clean that was inaccessible to a cleaning rag.

"No don't, I didn't intend to trouble you to this extent."

"Don't worry, I might as well do it while I'm here."

Dressed up in a uniform and apron, Liliana was hard at work with the cleanup.

This kind of routine-esque appearance gave people the impression that she was a newly-wed wife who undertakes the household duties all by herself. Not only that, a mysterious magical force arising from her enduring attitude made Godou's heart skip endlessly.

In short, he was unable to just let her clean alone.

As a result, Godou also helped clean in all quarters of the Kusanagi household. In Godou's point of view, Liliana seemed to behave as if she was instructed by the King's request or something along those lines. Because of that, he decided to join her in the cleanup.

During this occasional rest day, he sank into the awkward situation undertaking the role of a husband helping the wife of the house in tidying up.

This type of impression emerged in Godou.

At its conclusion, Liliana went home upon completing one hour of cleaning.

"That said, people in Japan would thoroughly clean their house during the end of year....."

In the end, Godou muttered to himself.

Although she was still far away from the meticulously cleaned first and second floor of the Kusanagi household, Godou still

decided to wait for the return of Shizuka inside the sublimely transformed house along with Liliana's diligently prepared dinner.

Soon after, the night had finally ushered in——.

"Onii-chan.....the situation regarding Mariya-senpai today was already a problematic issue and now you bring a girl home!? There 's no use playing dumb! Whether it's the dinner or the house that has become sparkling clean, it's obvious that it isn't Onii-chan who did it! Who did you bring over? It was Mariya-senpai wasn't it? Or was it another girl? It would probably be in your best interest to plead guilty!"

That night, Godou's house was filled with the affectionate conversation between brother and sister.

According to Shizuka, the silhouettes of girls had recently congregated around Godou. Don't be silly, I'm not the same as grandpa. Godou retorted in this way numerous times before finally driving away Shizuka.

After returning to his room, Godou sighed in relief.

At this time there was an incoming call on his cellphone. It was Yuri calling, Godou instantly picked up.

"Hello, is this Mariya?"

"Yes, I'm sorry for calling this late at night. If I may ask, are you free at the moment?"

After the polite greetings the conversation got underway.

This kind of etiquette and adherence to discipline is a trait of Yuri's. Godou was surreptitiously happy to be able to talk to her.

After hearing her voice through the phone, Godou immediately focused his attention.

"In regards to that situation up until now, there is one thing to report."

"That situation concerning Santa Clauses turning grey?"

"Yes, that phenomenon manifested itself this afternoon in the following seven locations which seem to have all been confirmed: Yotsuya, Mejiro, Nakano, Yoyogi, Roppongi, Nakameguro, Yurakucho.....right now Amakasu-san is currently on his way to investigate."

"It's still recurring?"

In the end, the Grey One committing "suicide" at Odaiba did not conclude this matter.

Plus the event had occurred in an imposing manner where it appears to be playing catchup for the last couple of days.

"After whatever you did was all said and done, were there any breakthroughs? If only Amakasu-san had information to pass along....."

"In regards to this situation, I have an idea what it is."

"Eh!?"

Godou was stunned at Yuri's sudden admission.

"After hearing the reports, I was bestowed with a divine revelation through my spirit vision. At long last I saw it. Although, I'm not sure whether or not this is accurate.....it's Erica-san."

"Huh, why that person?"

Could Erica really be the culprit? What does this all equate to?

"Even though she is a bit deceitful, she isn't the type of person who would carry out these sort of pranks."

"I agree. However, I have a very strong feeling that the crux for solving this situation at least focuses around Erica-san."

Erica Blandelli, out of all the people Godou knew, she was the most gorgeous and the most talented girl.

What information was she withholding? Without any clues, Godou nodded his head. Either call it quits or go through with it till the end——no, since matters have reached this stage, it would be best to bravely advance towards the finale.

Chapter 4 - Name of the God Heralding Midwinter?

Part 1

Subsequently about ten minutes after contacting Yuri, Godou got in touch with a certain someone.

In fact, he notified her by saying 'Santa Clauses are being greyified once again!'. He also wanted to utilize that familiar she used in the past to search for the culprit.

However, he relinquished that idea after sensing there was some kind of indescribable danger.

Viewing it from the perspective of a baseball team, expectations would dictate Kusanagi Godou to be either the fourth hitter or catcher. These were the positions he was accustomed to ever since he was a child.

On offense, the pinch hitter was allowed to distance hit. On defense, the pitcher and outfielders would be instructed to set up a containment. There were no inconspicuous movements on his side.

However, the fourth hitter for some reason decided to bunt the ball.

The catcher, who was supposed to be like a calm and unwavering central control tower, wanted to play in the outfield.

This type of vulgarness was comparable to the current situation.

Overextending oneself. The furthest thing from playing to one's talents. Didn't Amakasu mention earlier? "This is something that can be cleared up as soon as we sent out Committee members to investigate." Godou had no wish to trouble others even though the problem would be resolved without him doing anything personally.

Why did they have to operate in this fashion? They were still far from having the right person in the right place.

He felt profoundly dissatisfied——.

This was why Godou was determined to get in touch with that person. During times like these, he.....no, she should be someone he could rely on.

Presently on the 20th of December, two hours had passed.

Godou had avoided the gaze of Shizuka and snuck out of the house.

He boarded Amakasu Touma's car on Kototoi Street and headed off towards Area 3 of the Chiyoda ward. The setup of this ghost house-like western-style mansion gave the impression that they wanted to silently conceal themselves along this alleyway.

This place was where the person in charge of the Tokyo division of the History Compilation Committee resided.

To say that she was a beautiful girl would be too neutral and her voice was too thin to be considered a beautiful boy.

Incidentally, this woman was very adept at fooling around and among strategists, she was quite problematic to deal with.....

"Thank you for being able to come my King. Today I, Sayanomiya Kaoru, a person of humble talent, intend to use everything in my power to assist Kusanagi Godou."

The person who greeted them at the front door was Kaoru who was wearing a formal black butler's outfit.

She chose to speak in an incomparably exaggerated form, but the way she conveyed it was very natural.

Her bout of courtesy was humorous but also very elegant. Chuckling, Kaoru seemed to be completely at ease when she gave her witty greeting.

"I feel there is absolutely no need for this kind of flattery..... Why are you dressed up?"

"Since Kusanagi-sama wanted to personally come for a visit, I wanted to try and spruce up a bit for the occasion. Let's put this matter aside for now, please enter. Yuri and Liliana-san have already arrived."

Wearing a perfectly overdone men's outfit, this girl emitted a frivolous expression towards Godou.

After being invited inside her residence, two of his old acquaintances reappeared in the lounge.

"Godou-san, we were waiting for your arrival."

"We heard that the phenomenon happened again."

Seeing that this more or less turned into a formal mission for the Committee members, Yuri wore her entire miko attire while Liliana was dressed in a blue vest with black pants.

Godou and the others entered the spacious study together.

This area was actually Kaoru's office. It had also become the meeting room to assess countermeasures against heretic gods many times in the past. Godou proceeded to sit down on the couch . Afterwards, Liliana also sat down to his right.

She was completely oblivious, sitting down as if it was her established spot.

Their line of sight crossed paths. Liliana flashed an eye signal and Godou responded by nodding his head. It was finally time to thoroughly investigate the facts. The commencement of a critical juncture has initiated.

"....."

"? What's the matter Mariya?"

Godou inadvertently glanced at Yuri only to see she for some reason held a very staunch expression while gazing at him and Liliana.

After questioning her, the hime-miko suddenly became flustered and sat down towards Godou's left.

"N-Nothing's wrong. Speaking of which Godou-san, I'm not sure when it began but the relationship between you and Liliana-san has become much more intimate....."

"Intimate——uh, well, compared to our relationship from before it has improved slightly. Right Liliana?"

"Y-Yes I agree. Returning to that topic Kusanagi Godou, since when did your relationship with Mariya became much friendlier compared to before? As expected, this is probably the reason why there were rumors about you."

"Eh?" Godou was puzzled after hearing Liliana satirizing him.

"Yes, that must be it. Despite having additional vacant spots, Mariya Yuri sat by your side without the slightest hesitation. This is something I never would have imagined until this day."

"——! ? T-This meeting is only to discuss matters regarding the phenomenon in detail with Godou-san."

While replying, Yuri completely lost her composure due to fear from this sudden criticism.

"Also, it was Liliana-san who started this."

"I-I had the position of assisting Kusanagi Godou for this situation. Being his consultant, I'm only sitting at my natural post. And furthermore, even the way you address him has changed....."

The latter part of Liliana's words became a whining murmur that was difficult to hear discernibly.

No matter how one looks at it, he was caught between the two girls. The atmosphere became a tad awkward.

During this time, Godou coincidentally remembered something. Being able to strengthen his relationship with others was favorable . However, perhaps their relationship was a bit more unrestrained in the past.....?

"Hey. I see, so that was it."

On the other side, the calmly awaiting Kaoru who dressed up like a butler seemed to laugh out of amusement and nodded her head.

They appeared to be waiting and watching each other's responses. Just exactly what did she realize? Godou thought it was strange but also expressed gratitude towards Kaoru. All of the responsibilities for the arrangement at this location fell onto her.

In this chaotic situation, there was Yuri's spirit vision and the mysterious trump card Erica held. These matters should be quickly sorted out. Out of everyone gathered here, the most suitable candidate to accomplish this was none other than Kaoru.

Therefore, he used his cellphone to contact Kaoru. Within an hour he received a return call from her. At that time Kaoru straightforwardly told him "the location arrangements for the

emergency meeting has been set, please head over at this time. Erica-san will be there as well."

Her ability and skill to get the job done were still as good as ever. If Sayanomiya Kaoru was born in the right time period, she would have the moral character of a 'feudal leader' or a 'bishop'. Who made such a remark before?

"Looks like I made everyone wait."

Moreover, this girl seemed to take the role of a person who enters the stage last. Her attire consisted of a red overcoat along with tight black pants, paying tribute by pairing up 'red and black' as usual.

"After being contacted by Kaoru, I told Arianna to find the appropriate item. She went through the entire house, spending thirty minutes to find this. My maid, who also acts as my assistant, is really quite capable isn't she?"

Upon entering the study, she spoke with a tone of brightness. She didn't even do anything but it was like a shameless admission nevertheless. She revealed a broad smile, as expected of Erica Blandelli's temperament.

Erica suddenly revealed her findings which was a plain wooden chest.

The size of the cover attached to the top could fit into a person's hand. It was black in color and looked quite decrepit.

A click sound was made as Erica opened the lid. The contents inside were merely two, three dried up pieces of fruit that were about the same size as a ping pong ball.

It resembled nothing other than some sort of dried up fruit.

“Out of the magic related items I brought to Japan, this was one that I originally did not have on me at the time. It was not one of the items that came from Milan either. However, why would something like this be mixed in with the other stuff in my apartment? It is quite a peculiar predicament.”

Erica was smiling while looking around inside the wooden chest. She had a brazen smile that was without fear, like a malevolent lion skulking around to get in front of its prey.

“If you trust the note attached to the top of the chest, this box appears to be from the past——probably more than one hundred years ago. It was an object brought to earth by a heretic god appearing in Turkey. Recently there seems to have been various kinds of strange events occurring. In no way can the name of this god be just a coincidental match to what has occurred during these phenomenons."

“.....Quit posturing. Hurry up and say the name of the god already.”

Liliana interrupted her.

"What's so awful about a climax of this degree, Lily? I will never flounder the chance to be on center stage. This stunt is something everyone should know about me, Erica Blandelli."

After leisurely speaking, Erica suddenly announced:

"The name of the god is Saturnus. He was believed to be the god of agriculture in the Ancient Roman Empire. He is an existence who gave the populace crops and produce. Furthermore, he brought along the divine festival that Christmas originated from."

Liliana gently nodded. It looks like she recognized the name.

Saturnus, it should be the first time he heard that name right? Godou felt slightly ill at ease.

However, right now he had to ask about the doubts encountered from before.

"The origins of Christmas?"

"During the end of the year in Ancient Rome, they would conduct a grand festival for Saturnus every December. They dance, sing, drink wine, make a racket, and heartily cheer with merriment ."

Erica spoke with her usual clear-cut tone.

"The title of the god of agriculture originated from the appreciation of the current year's harvest and the festival where

prayers were held for a bountiful harvest the following year. During this festival, there appears to have been some sort of social custom where people present tree branches and fruits as gifts to each other. After this social custom was popularized in Christianity, remnants of it remained in various parts of Europe and eventually transformed into a social custom where 'gifts were to be exchanged during the festival hosted at the end of the year'."

"A couple of days ago I mentioned that Saint Nicolas was a Saint who brought the fruits of harvest. Saturnus was also a god of agriculture but he dates back much farther in time compared to the Saint of Christianity."

Liliana added on to that as if she was supplementing the explanation.

"By around the 11th century, Christianity had extended throughout Europe. During a time much prior to that, Europeans worshiped Cronus[10], Freyr[11], Dagda[12] and other indigenous gods of agriculture. Nevertheless, following the popularization of Christianity, these ancient gods were replaced by Saint Nicolas. The birth of Jesus Christ served as a form of replacement for the social custom of the great winter festival.

"Using our modern calendar, the harvest festival is held around December. This wasn't a rare occurrence for those who engaged within the the realms of agriculture. This festival was even held in ancient Egypt."

"Erica-san.....may I take a look at that thing?"

Yuri shyly asked Erica who was recounting unexpected information. Her gaze was cast towards the contents from inside the chest that the blonde beauty held in her hands.

"Of course, you didn't have to ask. Perhaps if we rely on Yuri's power we can see something that evades us."

Yuri walked towards Erica after leaving the couch.

She extended her hand to borrow the wooden chest of hers. Her pale index finger and middle finger reached into the wooden chest, trembling with fear as she touched the dried fruits dating over 100 years old.

Following that, Yuri's facial expression suddenly became very stiff. It seemed like she had a pretty clear impression from her spirit vision.

However, instead of being jubilant, Godou actually felt worried because Yuri's expression became excessively rigid.

"Does this mean it was an ominous proclamation?"

Yuri then anxiously replied to the worried Liliana.

"Y-Yes. I'm afraid that the massive power force I saw in connection to this fruit was located somewhere in Tokyo Bay. Furthermore, this force exists in close proximity to the city area."

Part 2

After Yuri described the scene she saw from her spirit vision, Kaoru winked discreetly.

The person who received this wink was none other than her trusty aide, Amakasu.

Even if his working attitude was extremely lackluster, it would still be unthinkable for anyone to doubt the special personnel's abilities. He took out a cellphone from his wrinkled suit and began negotiating with someone. Shortly after, the conversation ended.

After thirty minutes had passed, Kusanagi Godou was sitting in isolation aboard a speedboat along Tokyo Bay.

Who knows what sort of connections he had tapped into. The role of the Official History Compilation Committee was to arrange a patrol boat from the Japanese Coast Guard for Kusanagi Godou to ride on.

"The ocean is still freezing at night….."

"Indeed……"

Yuri chimed in during Godou's muttering.

Under these circumstances, it was inevitable that his body would be exposed to the piercing ocean breeze on the deck of the boat. The howling wind mercilessly snatched his body temperature. Furthermore it was still evening, which meant even the benefit of the sun was gone in this dark period of time. This further sped up the decrease of temperature.

"Mariya, don't you feel cold wearing that……? Oh yeah, there is a spare coat on the ship, you should probably borrow it. Just placing it over your body will be fine."

Yuri was wearing her usual attire which consisted of white robe plus a hakama.

Wearing something as thin as this on dry land would still be chilly, but in this case they were on a boat. In fact, Yuri's glamorous eyebrows which were exposed to the ocean gust had already turned pale.

"No thanks. The clothing I wear can't be too thick, otherwise the sensing will become slower. Even like this, there is no need to worry about me."

Because of the freezing ocean winds during the night, a person's body would definitely feel chilled to the bone.

Even under these conditions, Yuri did not withdraw due to the cold nor did she blow warm air onto her hands to warm herself. Rather, she firmly straightened her body and sternly stood there.

"Was the sensing you mentioned before referring to your spirit vision?"

"It does include that as well as the psychic sensing. Right now the sensing power is being extended in all directions to probe for the god's aura. Because there needs to be a slight adjustment in its strength, the cold temperature actually makes it easier to accomplish."

Right now the only people on the deck of the patrol boat were Godou and Yuri. The hime-miko utilized an uncommon ability of hers. She was currently looking for the location that matched the scene from her recent spirit vision.

"Ah.....so when it's cold it's somewhat easier to concentrate spiritually."

Godou utilized a sports mentality and nodded.

Morning exercises and martial arts activities during the winter time would lead to a rush of adrenaline and an elevated mental concentration. Perhaps those that loathe exercising were incapable of understanding the appeal of this.

"Actually, within the religious practices of the hime-miko, one must bear through winter's intense beatings."

"Very impressive. It has a miko-sama feeling to it."

"Yes, and with the other hime-mikos who were engaging in these religious practice, we learned on the spot together. Everyone showed restraint in spite of the adversity."

"Showing restraint in adversity?"

"In short, something cold can still get colder."

The hime-miko rarely joked like this. Godou wryly smiled and Yuri also revealed a smile that resembled a sakura wafting through the air. Normally this playful smile was never seen so it felt very refreshing.

"Then are you forcefully bracing yourself right now?"

"Honestly speaking, I am. My fingertips are so cold that they are practically numb."

Yuri's smile felt like it was done in distress as she raised her white fingers.

Even as she did this, her finger remained firm. Her gentle expression and manners were both peaceful as usual. The ability of this hime-miko to show restraint under these conditions had already been practiced to the point of perfection.

Although she said she didn't feel anything, Godou was still concerned for her.

"Really.....? Ha ha, looks like it. At least it would do you some good to warm up a little."

Godou muttered and unconsciously grabbed Yuri's hand.

It was as cold as ice. Only after he confirmed that her hand was colder than ice did Godou notice it. What am I doing? His and Yuri's line of sight connected.

Until just now, the hime-miko was always trying her best to show restraint under these rough conditions.

Her beautiful and composed facial expression in an instant turned completely red as she lowered her head.

The reason was certainly because Godou was holding her luxurious hand——.

“I-I’m sorry! I totally didn’t mean to act so recklessly!”

Godou immediately apologized. It was very unfathomable. He naturally extended his hand as if he felt he already held hands with Yuri many times before. This explains why he unconsciously stuck out his own hand casually for confirmation——.

Right now there should a scene where she would for sure say “ what are you doing!?” in rage.

Anticipating the hime-miko to be rightfully angry, Godou was mentally prepared to willingly withstand her vehemence.

However, Yuri instead lowered her head in embarrassment and mumbled:

“I-I understand. My fingers have already warmed up a bit.”

Speaking of which, Godou was still holding Yuri’s hand.

To one’s surprise, he had carelessly forgotten about releasing her hand. But thanks to this, the temperature from Godou’s hand was able to be transferred to Yuri’s hand, which slightly added some heat.

Surely enough, the tips of the hand, foot and such were much more susceptible to the cold for women compared to men.

Godou, who had yet to release her ice cold hands, felt embarrassed and unwittingly said:

“I-It should be fine after warming up for a bit longer right.....?”

"Y-Yes, you’re right. If it is too excessive then the sensing will become slower. Just for a bit longer really.....one minute, no, even if it’s just thirty seconds then....."

In response to Yuri's reply, Godou rubbed her hand.

Thirty seconds, no, a minute had quickly passed. However, he still wanted to warm her up a little and slowly continued rubbing.

Afterwards, Yuri and Godou's line of sight matched up. The two of them instantly lowered their gaze.

Yuri still hasn't said 'that should be good enough' to signal him to stop. As a result, Godou never had the time to say 'it should be about time to separate our hands'.

"Something like this won't affect your probing right?"

A calm voice interrupted them. Godou and Yuri released each other's hand in panic and looked in the direction where the voice came from.

As it turns out, Liliana was currently walking in their direction with Erica right behind her.

"I brewed some coffee even though we were in a rush. I thought that Mariya Yuri would feel very cold in her mission to oversee the monitoring so I felt very bad about this.

"O-Oh, I see! But it's nothing serious. Being slightly cold will allow the sensing to become very sharp!"

Yuri involuntarily used a brisk manner of speaking in reply to Liliana who was holding the thermos.

"Compared to this thermos, your body temperature seems to have increased greatly..... it's the same for Kusanagi Godou."

Liliana commented using a ridiculing tone while staring at the blushing red-eared Yuri and Godou.

Both of them had no way to retort what she said. They could only lower their heads and look down enduring the embarrassment.

"Well, isn't this the perfect time to take a break? Yuri, please take a break. Letting someone with irreplaceable talent such as you have a rest is also included within my duties."

Erica seemed to find this amusing as she interrupted them.

Furthermore, she gracefully chuckled while saying to her old friend and competitor:

"Even though I clearly understand Lily's resentment, you shouldn't be too hard on Yuri. Delving into a woman's jealous state of mind doesn't suit you at all."

"J-Jealousy!?"

Erica's statement left Liliana staring tongue tied.

"Yes. Actually, I recently heard an uncanny rumor regarding you. Yet you think it's some crazy fabricated statement. However, after you see it for yourself you will understand that this rumor lived up to its word."

"W-What kind of rumor did you hear Erica?"

Godou inquired because he felt a troubling premonition.

Hence, the girl who had the alias of Diavolo Rosso raised her head of golden hair which gave an impression of royalty and her pupils flashed with a rebellious and judgmental intent towards the devil king.

"Of course I'm referring to the love triangle you three have!"

"What! ?" "Eh! ?" "Love triangle! ?"

Godou, Yuri, and Liliana were all speechless. Moreover, Erica was getting more and more enthusiastic as she spoke.

"Due to the inadequate relationship Kusanagi Godou and Liliana Kranjcar have, it appeared the two of them were recently going between each other's houses frequently.....In addition, news of Kusanagi Godou's alternative lover was uncovered by Mariya Yuri. He even kneeled down for forgiveness."

"I-Is it like this Kusanagi Godou! ?"

"So the rumors were true! ? Ugh, to think that I had been astutely deceived by you before.....!"

Most of what Erica said was true, however she snuck in subtle facts that would lead to misunderstandings.

Yuri shivered at this revelation and gazed at Godou in shock.

As for Liliana, he was faced with a chiding look from her.

"With only the evidence from the situation, it seems that the referees' views of you are quite unfavorable. However, there is something else I should add. It's easy to believe that no matter what the circumstances were, Kusanagi Godou would never have this sort of ambition. Because Yuri and Liliana are both intelligent girls, you two mustn't be fooled by men like him."

Erica was nonchalantly judging Godou as she spoke.

"However I'm still very naive. Yuri and Liliana's complexion completely turned into that of a woman. Looks like you used some brilliant method to deceive the two of them, right Kusanagi Godou ?"

"This is a misunderstanding! I haven't done anything to victimize them! You two agree right?"

"Y-Yes. At the very least I haven't had this happen to me!"

"Exactly. At the very minimum he didn't do anything that resembled a deceitful and spurious relationship to me!"

The dialogue of the two girls appeared to have some subtle implications in response to Godou's question.

Plus, Yuri's gaze still flickered between Godou and Liliana while Liliana utilized an investigative look at Godou and Yuri. Both of them carried a depressed expression on their face.

Godou admitted defeat. He never thought it would turn out like this.

Nevertheless, Erica's arrival without a doubt strengthens the unity between the girls.

Surely enough, when this girl arrived on stage the entirety of the situation will be altered. Regardless if it was for better or worse

, she always became someone that people revolved around. Imposing her creative thinking within a team, she would become the focal point.

While he was clarifying this point, Godou and the others each drank a cup of coffee to warm up their body.

After that, in order to once again raise her concentration, Yuri distanced herself from Godou and the others to be alone. She then closed her eyes. Expanding her psychic sensing, she was probably probing the sea within close proximity.

"How is Amakasu-san doing in chasing that spirit?"

"Well, he is only pursuing the prankster who covered Santa Clauses in grey. I don't think anything out of the ordinary will happen....."

The red and blue knights were conversing while eyeing Yuri who was currently concentrating on her psychic sensing.

Before setting out, Liliana had used the familiar from before to probe the earth's aura.

Even though the matter with the most priority was the gate to Yuri's spirit vision, that other aspect could not be ignored either. Hence, Amakasu headed towards that location.

On the other side, Godou actually savored some sort of strange feeling and felt uneasy.

If it was during combat, his concentration would be raised to a high degree at will, transforming into his most optimal state. If a heretic god was nearby then a sense of elation along with a violent surge of power for battle would occur within his body and mind.

This was the body of a godslaying Campione.

Right now those feelings were totally nonexistent. Their destination was of course very treacherous.

Just when Godou was pondering over this dilemma, Yuri finally opened her eyes and returned.

There was actually nothing necessary to add regarding the struggle that will happen afterwards. Because an intense battle did not come to fruition, this subject was simply dropped.

Yuri's psychic sensing detected something on the waters of the Kasai seacoast.

It was a large emblem made out of stone. A stone sculpture that seemed to be carved out of a material like marble. The shape of a bird spreading open its wings was visible.

What was bizarre about the sight was for a bird emblem to actually emerge from the surface of the sea.

Moreover, it seemed like it was rooted there. Even though it was exposed to the intense ocean waves it remained motionless. It was solidly entrenched to the earth and fastened.

"....."

Liliana, who was looking at the emblem residing on the ocean surface from the edge of the patrol boat, displayed an incomprehensible expression.

Her hand was holding onto the familiar——a doll that had the shape of a pig.

"What's wrong?"

"This child couldn't sense the aura of the earth. Even though the power from the fruits of the trees was connected to Saturnus, I still think that it must be related to the omens of earth's bountiful harvests....."

Considering the various circumstances to this situation, thinking in this way was only natural.

Godou could not help but look at Yuri. With her more efficacious spirit vision powers compared to Liliana, she should be capable of discovering something. Godou figured it would be like this. Consequently, the hime-miko had an apologetic expression and said:

"I'm very sorry. Even I can't see what kind of power is hidden. All I see is some sort of grey mist surrounding that emblem."

"Did you say mist?"

"Yes. To put it simply, it appears someone is hiding its true form."

After Yuri quietly finished speaking, she once again gazed towards that emblem.

"Right now that emblem is emitting a power that corresponds to a god of earth. Just then sprouts were germinating. Godou-san, if we get any closer we might provoke it."

"Is this the divinity of the land that was born from the unidentified omens.....?"

"It looks like using ordinary methods will not work on this opponent!"

Liliana muttered while Erica on the other hand blatantly cut her off.

The knights' lines of sight were also fixated on the emblem on the surface of the ocean. Meanwhile, Godou also noticed the enormous amount of magical power being emitted in front of him.

As expected, this was the rejection between godslayers and godly possessions.

The nerves will always tense up when there is a burst of increasing divine energy.

A parasitic plant with a trunk, branches and dense flourishing foliage resembling that of an evergreen tree, was growing vigorously nonstop!

At first it was a small shrub. Then it turned into an enormous tree right before their eyes. The tree even appeared to be hundreds of years in age.

Finally, within a very brief period, a parasitic-like tree emerged at the center of Tokyo Bay. The height had to be above thirty meters. The tree's constitution was also proportional in magnificence to its height.

In terms of age, it certainly had the immense structure of a tree that was over one-thousand years old.

His Campione instincts told him that it was not a heretic god. However, he realized this existence was related to heretic gods since there was definitely divine power lodged within the tree.

"Since this lesser god, a divine beast, had an organic form, this thing is probably a divine plant or a divine tree."

Erica spoke admirably.

On the other side, the divine plant that suddenly sprouted rustled as its branches swayed. It began to emit a solemn incantation from its entire body.

It was simply in a frenzy, on the verge of confrontation.

"What a bastard, this tree actually wants to fight me!"

The vindictive aura and desire to battle emitted by the divine tree was definitely towards him, hence it came after Godou.

Using his Campione battling intuition, he personally felt this was the case. Even though it had the form of a tree, it was still an existence related to gods. It appeared to show hostility towards the godslayer, but.....

Just a moment ago, Erica compared it to a divine beast. In short, its strength should be quite unsubstantial.

If it were to face a Campione, it would clearly be considered a weak opponent——.

"Godou-san!" "Kusanagi Godou, over there!"

At this moment, the hime-miko and witch coincidentally warned him at the same time.

Did they acquire a spirit vision? They were pointing above a certain thick tree branch on the divine tree in front of them. Quietly standing straight at that place was the Grey One——!

It had the same form as the one from a couple days ago with the sailcloth covering its entire body.

During the follow-up at that time they found out that a few minutes prior, Amakasu was within Tokyo near the Aoyama district and had encountered the Grey One and pursued it. However, right at that moment was when the Grey One appeared in front of Godou as well. His pursued target had suddenly disappeared.

"Did this guy get resurrected over this period of time? Or did another similar guy appear? Which one is it....."

Godou grumbled while investigating what its true identity was.

The Grey One was walking on top of the branch while touching the divine tree's trunk. Following that, its sailcloth covered hand sank into the tree's epidermis!

Soon after its hand was buried inside. Even the elbow and shoulder were eventually engulfed.

In the end its remaining head, body, and feet were completely submerged inside the divine tree. The Grey One had completed its assimilation. Furthermore, Godou noticed something.

"It's withering.....?"

Up until now it had been a thriving lush colossal divine tree.

The delicate green tree leaves instantly dried up. The appearance of the tree branch and trunk seemed water deprived, dried up, withered. Shortly after, the small tree branches started to fall off one after another. The splash created foam on top of the water as soon as it crashed into the sea.

Furthermore, it was similar to the Grey One who committed suicide before——.

The divine tree slowly crumbled like a building made of sand. Its remnants drifted towards the sky as parts of it were carried by the ocean breeze.

What remained was the bird emblem floating on the surface of the ocean. It still remained motionless despite the force of the ocean waves as if it was rooted firmly on the ocean surface.

"This time did the Grey One kill the divine tree.....?"

"It intentionally slaughtered its ally after meeting a Campione? Understanding the reasoning behind this is impossible."

Liliana and Erica both spoke with a perplexed expression. Godou tried to ask Yuri.

"What do you think Yuri? Since this has happened, do you believe the disturbance will settle down?"

"W-What will happen.....? I just have an uneasy feeling in my chest. If it continues like this, the same thing will happen again——no, I feel this situation may worsen."

Godou nodded as if indicating "yes" towards Yuri's worried declaration.

Had the large divine tree attacked a moment ago, the summoning of the Boar would probably be enough to comfortably kill it. But without having to do any of that, those guys had already vanished by themselves.

Perhaps this was the critical point in time――.

Part 3

Once the unexpected evening cruise at Tokyo Bay was over, Godou returned home at one in the morning.

However, he did not go to sleep right away. He sat seiza-style on his sheets and continuously pondered over the situation for about two hours.

Afterwards, morning came around with Godou waking up at six o'clock. On a notepad, he wrote that he did not require breakfast and then departed from the house before Shizuka woke up.

He then immediately snuck into the empty classroom and continued to contemplate over the situation. Ever since yesterday, he became really concerned over this matter. After reflecting about it without interruption all the way till fifteen minutes before class started did he finally arrived at an answer. Godou let out a heavy sigh.

In the end, it was going to end up like this wasn't it? This answer was one that he could somewhat accept.

It was braving the risk of Shizuka saying "Why did you leave the house so early in the morning!? Are you trying to stealthily hide something sinister from me?" later on. After evaluating in solitude he had arrived at this conclusion.

Soon after, he returned to his normal state of mind.

Liliana arrived at school and briefly conversed with the others. She received an elegant greeting and a sneer from Erica as well as an invitation by Nanami and the three idiots which went as followed, “The maid coffee shop is already outdated, let’s enjoy the winter special at the frequently visited maid slushie shop, the large strawberry slushie”.

During this time, before he knew it class had begun.

Today was December 21st. It was the day of the end of term ceremony. After the ceremony concluded without a hitch, Godou welcomed the end of school.

Winter break was currently underway. Of course, the insides of the classrooms and school were still permeating with energy. There were students who went out to play directly after school as well as a group who discussed about the scheduled activities during break. However, Godou chose not to participate in this kind of fervor.

He immediately left the classroom and seized Yuri from the adjacent classroom.

Moreover, he repeatedly pleaded to her to inform him of the state of affairs regarding the post-event processing for the event from yesterday night.

“Everyone in the committee were discussing whether or not we could shut down this phenomenon.....However, I’m afraid it was a

god who created that divine artifact. I think the probability of a human creating it is extremely low.....”

This was what Yuri anticipated.

After thanking her for providing this information, Godou headed towards the gym.

“What’s the purpose for asking me to come to this kind of place ?”

Erica, who had come to this location, spoke with a commanding tone.

Whether slinging criticisms with polite sarcasm or acting mysteriously ill-tempered, Erica's recent attitude towards Godou carried elements of both. No, even before that he had always felt this way.....

In short, the reason was probably because she wished to avoid having a friendly conversation with him.

However, Godou wanted to converse with Erica right now. Even though this was the case, he felt if he just brought up the topic upfront he would easily be evaded in a graceful manner just like before.

So he thought of a plan which involved using an email to call her out.

After the end of term ceremony I’ll be waiting in the sports field . P.S. Don’t run away——.

"Recently the amount of exercising I have been doing isn't adequate. I would like to give my body a bit of a workout."

It was the baseball field for the academy's high school section. Godou stood at the field's home plate as he spoke. Placed by his feet were baseball bats, gloves, and balls taken from the sports storage room.

"Accompany me for a bit. You've played prior to class before so it should be no problem right?"

Godou spoke as he grabbed a glove and baseball.

"Even if you are my opponent, I will still pitch an unhittable ball."

"You sure know how to flatter yourself. You ought to know that I, Erica Blandelli, am a girl who can do more than just wield a sword right? There are very few weapons that I can't utilize as I please."

Even though the provocation was unremarkable, it appears that he had provoked her fighting spirit.

Unable to resist letting out a small burst of laughter, she picked up the baseball bat. Simply just this behavior alone was like part of an agile dance routine, a picturesque action.

Was this thanks to being born with athletic aptitude and a Latin sense of rhythm?

"I was still thinking about the recent touchy feely business going on between you, Lily, and Yuri and that you should receive a suitable punishment. You asking for trouble like this actually really makes me happy."

"W-What punishment? Hey."

What was her reason for being that easily provoked? Godou started to complain in response.

"I didn't do anything to them. Our relationship only improved just a bit."

"Do you think only an improvement in relationship would result in a love triangle? I can't believe this would happen unknowingly. Being as foolish and unwitty as you, you wouldn't know how to read the mood and cower away from girls. Also, during those times you always act carefree. Just what I would expect from Kusanagi Godou's personality."

"D-Don't act like you can see through my personality!"

"See through you? Matters regarding you I always seem to——eh?"

Erica revealed a perplexed expression. Godou also had a feeling of uneasiness. They were currently conversing during their pitching competition. The communication link to their dialogue seemed to have been severed by scissors.....

"Forget about it. In a moment I will have you experience my supremacy!"

Erica brushed aside any hesitation and proceeded to put her hand on the uniform's dress.

She tore it apart without any hesitation, making a tear on each side to give herself more mobility. Furthermore, she raised the baseball bat in an upward slant. She made this posture predicting she would hit a homerun.

Overall her appearance was like a drawing. However, that posture was composed of gorgeousness. Even the aura of a slugger emanated from her.

After being separated for so long, he once again experienced Erica's talent and beauty. Godou felt inconceivably upbeat. As expected, without this kind of behavior it would not be her.

Godou felt the corners of his mouth rise as he proceeded to the pitching mound.

"Let's start with five pitches ok? If you are able to send a ball flying then you win."

"Ara, giving me such advantageous conditions, are you sure about that?"

"Haha, it'll be fine this time. Here I come."

Following that, Godou pitched five balls in a row. Erica's baseball bat was unable to even graze one ball. No, she actually didn't even swing once.

"Hey Godou.....aren't the balls you just pitched overlooking the premise of baseball?"

Within the words of the red colored devil carried a tone of criticism as she muttered.

"The balls should be pitched directly towards me with the outcome of whether I hit it or not being the competition in

progress right? However, the balls you pitched were all excessively too high or to the sides."

Precisely as Erica said, Godou's pitches were atrociously thrown.

The balls that Godou pitched staggered either too far to the side or went above the blonde beauty standing in the batter's box. Because he considered the scope of Erica's arm length and the length of the bat, he implemented his plan to pitch in the places where she was incapable of reaching.

"It's fine like this. Since my objective was to only avoid letting you hit the ball, I never intended on issuing a fair competition."

As expected, baseball related sports are not mainstream in Italy.

Not even the knowledgeable Erica had heard of the concept of walking the batter so Godou explained the intention behind this course of action.

".....So it's like that. This time I'll bear with the loss. Basically it' s the same as what you said before."

"Are you referring to the objective of avoiding attaining victory or defeat upfront?"

With only this degree of explanation, a tint of understanding gradually emerged from Erica's pupils.

We were easily able to converse. Maybe my relationship with this girl really wasn't that bad.

Godou felt this was unbelievable as he took it another step further and said:

"The divine tree, the grotesque Grey One and so on, I feel like the goal of those guys is to prevent me from fighting. Isn't that why every time I get close those subordinates would commit suicide?"

Ever since the divine tree located at Tokyo Bay crumbled, he had always——.

After taking another look at the reason why those grey guys were that suspicious, he had come to a decision. It was to listen to Erica's opinion concerning this matter since he didn't understand the reason why.

If he wanted to find someone knowledgeable to help him, then Kaoru would suffice. If a magic savvy knight was mentioned, Liliana demonstrated even more flexibility. Compared to Yuri who is the kind of person who possessed an abnormal spirit sensing ability, no other diviner could be as good of a conversational partner.

However, despite all of this he still wanted to get Erica's opinion.

Why would he do that? Kusanagi Godou had already overcome many battles to the death. However, due to her frequent support in many instances during those battles——Erica also appeared to have a sense of importance.

Without any basis for it, this was how he felt.

"If it's like this then there would only be one reason."

Once she heard Godou's opinion, Erica spoke in an imposing manner.

That clear cut tone gave Godou an indescribable feeling of reliability.

"To buy more time. It's hard to believe that their actions would serve for any other constructive purpose."

"So I'm right?"

"Yeah. In short it's the equivalent of protecting a city. The soldiers in the city surrounded by a large army will desperately try to defend to the death, striving to engage in a defensive battle. By doing this, they are waiting for allies to come rescue them.

Godou nodded while saying 'I see' towards the reasoning behind the battle tactics Erica described.

The reason for buying time was uncertain, but based on her description it would make sense.

"Except, if we were to account for non-constructive reasonings... ..."

"Are you saying there is a possibility that it isn't a constructive plan?"

"Yes. For example, since the enemy is closely pursuing them during the defense of a city, situations where there are a loss of judgment occur quite frequently. Without reinforcements they would blindly fight to the end. There is also the situation right now with the intriguing actions done by these guys.....it could also be possible that it has ties to a religious ceremony."

"Uhh"

In that case, there existed the possibility of it being irrational as well?

Upon hearing Erica's point of view, Godou suddenly felt a flash of insight.

"Then in that case, what you are focusing on could precisely be the breakthrough to the nucleus of the problem. Being able to elaborate to that extent is quite interesting."

"That's really flattering of you."

Giving an obvious praise would undoubtedly be good, but why does she need to be so tactful?

However, this was typical of Erica so Godou forced a smile.

"As a noblewoman, I should at the very least reward a gallant knight. Please be my temporary opponent once again."

After she finished speaking, Erica extended her hand towards the area where the baseball equipment laid.

This time she picked up both the glove and baseball.

"Let me crush your ego as we decide a legitimate winner this time."

"Wait a second. You definitely mentioned giving a reward, how come it feels like you want to defeat me?"

"The best reward is to simply enjoy the moment together where you and I, Erica Blandelli, can decide on the outcome of a battle. Also, if you want to win, a man would do it with his own two hands right?"

Erica had a fearless smile as she spoke. Sure enough it was her lioness smile.

Fighting till the end? Godou also gave a heartfelt smile. For the moment, backing down was not an option when his dignity as a man was called into question.

This time Godou picked up the baseball bat.

Afterwards the two of them agreed to the ambiguous rule that if he missed the ball then Erica wins, if it is hit then Godou wins. This was not so much a competition, but rather them having fun playing ball.

Part 4

In the end, the two of them played ball all the way till the sun was about to set.

Godou was currently walking along Nezu street where a section of it was dyed in an orange hue by the sunset. Erica was by his side and the two of them walked all the way here together.

Godou's reasoning for this was that it unknowingly happened.

Once the unresolved competition had concluded and the equipment had been put away, Erica very naturally followed him after he said "well, it's about time to go home".

Although, if he wanted to refuse walking together with her, there were many reasons he could have come up with. However, overall he felt a 'this is pretty good' kind of feeling.

Why does Erica want to follow him? Perhaps it unknowingly happened for her as well. Superseding all this was an issue regarding.....

"I feel pretty hungry after that thorough exercise."

He spoke of his animal-like desires in this manner. Erica was unfazed as a result and instead ignored all the ensuing reasons for it.

"Same here. There's still some time before dinner, let's just find some other place to hang out in the meantime."

"You're still the same as before, completely ignoring the necessity of having a balanced diet."

"Those portions had already become the calories for daily consumption. I haven't overlooked the intake and expenditure calculations in regards to this aspect."

The two of them walked in jest to the Nezu Sanchome shopping district. There were still a few minutes before arriving at Godou's house.

Just as Godou thought it was about time to say goodbye, Erica suddenly stopped in her tracks.

"Actually, this has been on my mind for quite a while now. You could say that I've been restraining myself like someone enduring the passage of time, but there really is an indescribable flavor permeating the air here."

The place Erica was looking at was a Chinese restaurant that Godou recognized.

To put it politely, a shabby looking restaurant would be a suitable description. Indeed, its style, making the place known as the "town's China shop", refers to the shop's structure that had been maintained all the way since the Showa period. The restaurant was covered in oil stains and dirt.

The outer appearance would compel any teenage girl to immediately distance herself from this establishment.

However, Erica was instead attracted to this decrepit and filthy place. With that said, could it be that regardless of the restaurant's

style and cooking that were completely devoid of personality, as long as the disgusting food still honored its characteristic flavor it would fit Erica's dietary lifestyle?

"So it's that one. Well, if it's Erica then she wouldn't mind" said Godou.

After all, he was a native inhabitant so the type of restaurant was very clear to him. There was a provocative advertisement pasted on the glass door entrance that had the words 'mud wonton , mud dumpling, mud ramen' printed on it.

"It's a pretty interesting restaurant, I like it a lot. Well, goodbye. "

"Godou, please hold on for a sec."

Just when he was about to take his leave, Erica grabbed his arm.

"You intend to provoke the expectations of I, Erica Blandelli, solely so you can head back by yourself first?"

Erica spoke in a fearless manner while having dragged Godou to her side.

"If it turns out that it isn't as interesting as you guaranteed, I will hold you accountable. So please accompany me a bit longer."

"Eh eh! ?"

I was undoubtedly close to home, why must I go with her? Godou displayed an intention to decline her.

However, there was probably no way to overpower the intensity exerted from Erica's strong muscles. In the end, he was dragged into the restaurant by her.

After that, an hour had passed.

"I see, it's just a restaurant with freshwater fish cuisine containing a muddy aftertaste."

After sampling practically all of the dishes on the table, Erica appeared to speak with profound admiration.

The cuisines consisted of snakehead fish plus wonton made with celery, carp repeatedly fried in oil, a steamed dish with eel and tofu, and there was a dish they were attentively staring at named 'catfish mud dumplings with sweet vinegar stuffing'.

"How should I put it? It makes people cast doubts on the original meaning of a cuisine. It seems like they wanted to conceal the muddy odor by using spices and specially grounded freshwater fish paste mixed together. However, this will never fool me. So that's why they added a filling so sweet that anyone would get tired of it."

"As expected, you really like those kinds of dishes that are difficult to eat and the taste of anything crudely made."

Godou sighed in sorrow as he spoke to Erica who was analyzing the cuisine's taste with vigor.

After glancing over the restaurant's menu and ordering many dishes, Godou immediately gave up on eating at home. He already called Shizuka to let her know he was going out to eat.

As a result, Godou maneuvered his chopsticks without worry.

After taking a bite off the carp fried in oil, he felt the texture of the crunchy and flaky skin to be very well done.

It was not just some crudely made food, this place actually specialized in freshwater fish cuisine.

"The father of the restaurant's owner seemed to have gone to China in the past in order to go to school. As a result, he became fascinated with a dish made out of a fish caught in some sort of Yangzte River tributary. He had previously said that he generally studied authentic Cantonese cuisine. Although, this restaurant's flavor isn't true Cantonese style."

This restaurant however was a place where the owner often carried out his own culinary creations.

Especially items such as the catfish dumplings, it is doubtful whether or not it even exists in China. This was why Godou had initially refused to enter the establishment. Erica then cheerfully said:

"Since it's like this, let's also call Lu Yinghua at some later point in time and let him have a taste. That kid was raised in Hong Kong ——the cuisine there originated from Cantonese cuisine. The Lu

household in Hong Kong should also have a Cantonese restaurant in business."

"Eh? Yinghua?"

Hearing this familiar sounding name gave Godou a jolt.

However, why is it that up until now I had forgotten this name? Lu Yinghua. A name with Ying, a friend of the same age.....? Where would I have encountered this guy?

And right now there was this equally important matter.

Within his name was actually the word 'Ying'. On the confusing warning email, the name Ying also appeared in the email sender's name——. Could this be considered purely coincidental?

"Where is that guy and what's he doing right now.....?"

"Ara, now that you mention it where did he go.....?"

When this seemingly familiar person of importance was mentioned, Erica, who was much more adept at gathering intelligence compared to any other person and was frequently capable of grasping other people's movements, felt perplexed.

Due to her uncharacteristic reaction, Godou couldn't help but put pause his chopstick movements for a bit and began to ponder.

"If you don't mind, would you like to come to my house for a bit? You are welcomed to have some tea."

Godou asked as soon as they exited the Chinese restaurant. Why does he feel a bit reluctant to part ways with Erica?

Also, doesn't she feel the same as well? It was very intuitive to believe this was the case.

"I suppose so. I don't want to be like some sort of vulgar person who overstays.....Even though I really want to say something along those lines, perhaps it will be fine this time."

The foul-mouthed Erica avoided saying it straightforwardly like she would usually do. Plus, it was obvious there was an unfathomable change happening within her, something made her feel indecisive.

"However, I can't go. There's a place I need to pay a visit. This matter is probably more important than your invitation."

After only saying a few words, Erica quickly took off.

Godou sighed. Even though he felt they got along during those past few hours, maybe his belief was wrong? Well, there is nothing he can do about it. Furthermore, Godou had some matters to carefully reflect on.

There was the name Erica previously said, Lu Yinghua, as well as the email notifying him that there will be something revived during the winter solstice. The sender was Lu Yinghua.

The so-called Ying was probably Lu Yinghua. In addition, what exactly is the resurrection that was mentioned——?

"Onii-chan! What is up with you going on a dinner date with that blonde haired study abroad student living near our house!? There's no use pretending to be stupid because I was notified by a number of people who saw you two at that restaurant!"

As he returned home and began thinking through things, Shizuka suddenly started interrogating him.

Godou ignored her and returned to his own room on the second floor. Where could he meet Lu Yinghua? After checking his cellphone for an address, he realized that the number was registered on his phone.

He immediately called him, however he was unable to reach him.

Godou felt very anxious. Up until now he had been feeling a very intense sensation of being trapped. The feeling was akin to being enclosed in a maze.

However, the structure of this maze seemed to be pretty simple. Even if he was trapped, couldn't he just pulverize the walls of the maze? If only there was something to give him a push, he would clearly be able to do so!

While he was feeling extremely anxious, the cellphone displayed an incoming call.

The display screen showed Seishuuin Ena as the incoming caller . He recalled that she was the Hime-Miko of the Sword, Yuri's friend, and she was someone whom he had seen many times before.

Nevertheless, their relationship is not at the point where they could exchange personal contact info.....right?

His memory was really vague so he was unable to think very much in detail. In any case, he might as well press the talk button first to receive the call.

"Ah, Your Majesty? It's been so long since we last saw each other! Right now Ena is at Mount Mitsumine. Has the party's location been determined yet?"

The voice coming from across the phone had a blunt, cheerful, and optimistic feel to it.

Godou was at a complete loss towards her candidness and questioned her in response.

"What do you mean by party.....?"

"You know, the Christmas one. Ena would always go to the mountains during these times so this kind of thing would actually a first for me. Everyone will be eating an entire bird right?"

"Christmas party.....?"

It was his first time hearing about this activity. No, was this really the case? Didn't everyone go over this before?

——Even though it's a bit bold, I might as well take responsibility for the task of hosting it.

——Well, incidentally holding a gathering within the house sounds pretty nice.

——However, is a miko normally allowed to celebrate Christmas?

——I guess the level of strictness isn't to that extent. Furthermore——.

——Every year around this time Kaoru-san would become very ferocious. Starting from around the 20th, every day she would be going out with the girls. With a person as difficult to deal with as her, even the nagging from her senior would prove to be useless.

'This year we will do it precisely as Your Majesty suggested. I will be done with these religious practices before Christmas. For the time being Ena will be staying here. Everyone wanted to go watch the New Year's sunrise together. Would it be ok if we viewed it from Mt. Fuji?'

The vivid conversation and memory transferred through the phone was enshrouded.

"My suggestion....."

'Of course, did you forget? Ah, well then, how's it going over there? Your Majesty and cult leader-sama had just met. If you are still alive right now, does that mean everything went alright?'

"....."

She kept on saying things that he could not recall, puzzling Godou.

As a result, on the other side of the phone, Ena whispered 'Your Majesty is behaving really strange today'.

'Uh, what? Eh.....so it's like that. It turned out like this huh.'

She suddenly started saying some strange things.

"What are you mumbling about, what's the matter?"

'Just then, the Ama no Murakumo updated Ena on the most recent situation. It seems quite chaotic, but there is no need to worry. If Your Majesty wishes to battle, call out the Ama no Murakumo. An action of that degree should be able to easily break the curse.'

"Did you say curse! ?"

'Yeah, uh……my batteries are running out. Ena will immediately head to Tokyo. As expected I must accompany Your Majesty in order to avoid boredom!'

After leaving some brief words, the line was suddenly disconnected.

With that said, it was rather troublesome that Ena's cellphone would always lag due to insufficient battery power. Furthermore, she was able to use the cellphone as a medium to communicate with a guardian god.

An example would be with Susanoo. This time it was basically communicating with the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi lodged within Godou's right arm!

"——Oh yeah! Me and Seishuuin are both utilizing this guy aren't we!?"

Godou finally recalled bond he had to the Miko of the Sword.

In addition, he even comprehended the meaning behind Ena's words. The Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was a divine sword under the possession of Godou. For the most part he avoided using it as a blade, instead he used this sword's treasure trove of useful functions.

One of which was the ability to break apart magic. Although, its abilities appear to have no effect when used against gods and Campiones. Nevertheless, against these comparatively weak forms of wizardry it was easily able to absorb the effect, rendering it useless.

Godou directed his attention towards his right arm. The words ' awaken!', which were directed to the hibernating sword, resounded within him.

Being among those with the blood of [Steel], he lacked interest in anything other than combat matters. That was why other than in critical moments, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi would hibernate.

Ena appeared to be capable of engaging a sword of this disposition in casual conversation while Godou was incapable of doing so.

——Are you calling for me, King?

Upon hearing that haughty reply, Godou immediately issued out an order.

"If you notice anything out of the ordinary, be sure to promptly give a warning!"

'Didn't we go over this before? My demeanor is that of a faithful sword god. There would be no harm in showing off a bit if you wanted to engage in battle.'

"If it's a battle you want then be quiet and mind your own business."

Godou was conversing with the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi lodged within his arm while hurrying towards Nezu station.

Fortunately it was already the dead of night. After 2 A.M. the number of pedestrians present around Nezu were scarce in number so he didn't have to bear the befuddled expressions of others.

"Hey, in order to disturb the area around me, he used a curse which had messed up our memories. Can other people break free from the curse as well?"

Just then, I was referring to the removal of the curse that altered my usual behavior.

The results were quite significant, right now Godou had already returned to his normal self.

Kusanagi Godou was the Campione residing in Tokyo. His partners included Erica Blandelli, Mariya Yuri, Liliana Kranjcar, and Seishuuin Ena——.

However, the only one with him today was the person of steel located within his right arm.

'You could just have me out in front but there is no point in doing so.'

"Why?"

'This curse is from the heretic god of bountiful harvests.....no, I bet he is still plotting to have his newly born priest do something. Under all circumstances when the one serving as a priest is present , even when the curse is broken a new one will be reapplied. Unless you sever the root of its cause there is no point in doing anything else.'

"Basically you're saying my entire surroundings are being enveloped by the curse."

'Of course. A priest's power is to guide the people. Engulfing one or two metropolises with this power that manipulates the minds of the masses shouldn't be a surprise right?'

Rather than calling this mental manipulation, it would be better to say this was the power to manipulate the masses.

Godou recalled Verethragna's Goat incarnation, a priest's power to minister the hearts of the masses. This kind of psychic sensing previously enveloped Tokyo's Hibiya district as well as the Nikkou district.

With that said, the psychic sensing utilized by Yuri was also capable of being spread across a pretty large-scale area.

"In other words, the scope of this type of power is quite vast..... "

To think we actually possess these types of troublesome powers .

Godou included himself within the concerning group of people who had superpowers beyond belief.

"Well, since it's like this, having the range subjected to just being within Tokyo is actually quite good."

So that was why Ena, who resided in the Chichibu mountains, was able to evade being affected.

The curse this time was targeted towards Kusanagi Godou. This was so the relationship of the Campione Kusanagi Godou and his partners would drift apart, rendering them incapable of operating effectively. The objective of those guys who brought about this matter was precisely as Erica had predicted, they wanted to buy time.

For the sake of reviving the heretic god Saturnus!

"Overall we made a breakthrough. Now to figure out how to retaliate....."

'Hahaha very well, King. You can use this momentum to raise your fighting spirit and battle recklessly.'

"I-Idiot! If the enemy were to avoid battling and retreat that would be the best case scenario right? Don't always talk about these outrageous matters!"

Having his desire to battle apprehended, Godou tried to cover up the truth in a panic.

Godou rushed onto a tram towards Shinjuku. He had to meet up with Lu Yinghua as soon as possible——It was imperative to first contact the nephew of the mischievous sworn elder sister who had imposed a certain mission on him.

Through the JR subway interchange route, he had arrived at Shinjuku station.

Rushing past the vast station area, he headed towards the streets during the evening. His destination was Kabukicho, a sort of high class downtown area that most high school students should steer clear from.

Lu Yinghua was a young cadre leader representing the Lu household located in Hong Kong——.

They have a maid related business establishment operating at Akihabara. However, that is merely something experimental. It seemingly was meant to try and establish a stronghold presence within the redeveloping Electronic Street.

They were one of the so-called Chinese gangs. This group had a stronghold located in Hong Kong.

In Japan, it should be said that their original sphere of influence was in Shinjuku and Ikebukuro. Godou wanted to visit the place previously known not too long ago as the Shinjuku business that sold beds of Japanese variety.

By virtue of memory, Godou navigated through the Kabukicho crowd.

His destination was a certain rundown multi-tenant building. Heading inside, Chinese restaurants, massage centers, mahjong parlors, and acupuncture clinics etc. could be seen as he walked towards the flight of stairs within the building to get to the uppermost floor.

The moment he entered the reputation lacking and brandless business, Godou said:

"Pardon my intrusion, I wish to speak to the young master——would it be ok to address him as such? I would like to speak with Lu Yinghua, can you help me reach him? Perhaps you guys already know, I'm Kusanagi Godou."

Within the firm's spatial arrangements were some cheap chairs and tables for the business.

At first glance, this seemed to be the office of some small or medium enterprise. However, the people on duty here seemed to be bald men who were two meters in height and have tattoos pierced on their foreheads. These casanovas wearing their gaudy suits clearly did not look like honest people.

Furthermore, no matter how you look at them, there were people who looked like short guys with thin, white beards, holding divine inscriptions. They appeared to be nonreligious people engaging in soothsaying. There were also effeminate men who were currently doing their makeup after just opening up their makeup products.

In a certain sense, it could be said that it was a group where villains and heroes were mixed together like the Outlaws of the Water Margin[13].

They were all important members from the Japanese division within the Lu household.....one would think. Requesting them to give it their all was Godou's first step for retaliation.

Chapter 5 - Incident's Cause and True Culprit

Part 1

This situation had started during December——.

During then were Kusanagi Godou's last moments of peace. The entire world was in tranquility just after the battle against Lancelot, the War God of the Lance, had ended. On December 3rd, he was leisurely at ease when his sister Shizuka's birthday came around. Although the day for the end of year exams were fast approaching, when compared to a battle between a deity and a devil king, it wasn't really a big deal.

Well, there has been a bit of turmoil.

Their grandpa had left for Bhutan four days before Shizuka's birthday.

"Starting today, the responsibility of cooking will fall onto me for the time being. What's something good I should fix up?"

Godou mentioned this in the academy's courtyard while eating and idly chatting away.

The scenery of his surroundings were still the same as before with the three girls Erica Blandelli, Mariya Yuri, and Liliana Kranjcar by his side.

"Speaking of which, Godou-san has made various kinds of dishes before. This has nothing to do with me."

Yuri carried a warm smile as she spoke. She probably remembered the time at Nikkou.

However, in actuality Godou had a reason for being indecisive.

“The problem is this. Occasionally cooking something is fine, but I feel like I don’t have the ambition to persevere through an official daily cooking routine.”

“Please don’t talk about these matters using that expression you use during battle.”

Liliana made a smooth and natural assertion, however her expression actually turned into embarrassment.

But there was no other way. Kusanagi Godou felt that he possessed the characteristics of an honest and considerate person, however, he lacked the discipline of a husband who enjoyed doing household chores and the disposition of a manageable guy who was incapable of cooking.

“During times like these, I would have probably used curry to conveniently solve this problem. If I were to use a large pan and fill it to the top, cooking something of that size would last three, four days. A simple yet convenient method.”

“””.....”””

The reactions of the girls were all very subtle. Yuri cautiously went silent, but you could see she carried a slight bit of sorrow in her eyes as she thought about the meaning behind the question “

Would this be ok?". Liliana on the other hand shook her head in distress as she thought "So that means this person is really.....". Her face looked sullen as she sighed.

As for the last person, Erica remained silent while she was eating her sandwich. Afterwards she said,

"Hey Godou, if it was me and you came to my house and continued to prepare those crudely made dinners several days in a row, I would probably decide to revolt against the King after two days."

Erica spoke with complete indifference.

"At least put in a little more effort. It'd be so boring if you did that."

"I don't have the guts to make those hazardous dishes that you find interesting to put up a fight. As long as it can be prepared with simplicity, tastes good, and is nutritious, it would be good enough for me."

"Even so, that is extremely dull. Doesn't life basically revolve around eating?"

"Shizuka would probably also feel depressed as a result....."

After Godou retorted Erica's comments, Liliana spoke her own opinion. Yuri on the other hand casted her gaze downwards.

What Godou felt at this moment was the separation due to the differences in culture between boys and girls.

For the relatively easygoing, frequently exercising male, Kusanagi Godou, there was absolutely nothing wrong with this sort of dietary lifestyle consisting of "eating curry for breakfast, lunch, and dinner for three days in a row".

But, could it be that girls were different?

He finished his lunch while still bearing the indecision to his problem. Once his afternoon classes had concluded, his day of school was over.

As soon as he returned home and put away his backpack, he would head out to purchase the ingredients for tonight's dinner. What should I make.....He stressed over this issue on his way back . Unexpectedly, he found Liliana waiting by the entrance to his house.

The Kusanagi household was located on the Nezu Sanchome shopping district.

Since it was an old bookstore back in the days, the entrance on the first floor was directly facing the street of the shopping district. In other words, the silver-haired European girl standing at this location received a lot of attention from the people passing by and the neighbors. However, Liliana remained calm and collected while disregarding their gazes and said to Godou:

"I was waiting for you Kusanagi Godou."

"Why are you here, is something wrong? Would you like to come inside first?"

"No, before going in we must first purchase tonight's dinner ingredients."

Liliana spoke firmly. Godou felt puzzled and responded with " going shopping?".

"Since you, as our lord, said you didn't have the attitude to cook every day, as your number one knight it is imperative that I assist you. Let me handle tonight's dinner ok?"

"Eh! ?"

"Moreover, you don't need to regard me as an outsider. Clearly all you needed to do was mention 'please cook tonight's dinner'. However, you need to figure it out for yourself one day."

Liliana's complaint appeared to contain a slight hint of criticism in it. Godou hurriedly waved his hands,

"T-There is no need, these problems only apply to my household."

"Did you forget? I, Liliana Kranjcar, am the sole person who would certainly undertake your personal tasks. Problems in the kitchen are of course within my realm of responsibilities. Is there anything you would like to eat tonight?"

In the end, Godou was unable to decline and thus they headed off together along the shopping district.

They went through butcher shops, vegetable and fruit markets, fresh fish stores, supermarkets etc.

Just as Godou retrieved his wallet to pay the bill, Liliana resolutely stated “the household spending is also part of my responsibilities”.

He had no choice but to just hand the wallet to her and let her decide how to spend the money (after all, there was no way to tell her to pay upfront and allow him to repay the expense later).

Afterwards they returned home. Liliana put on her own commonly used apron around her uniform and started to cook.

Godou was politely declined when he offered to help and was currently bored while idly standing by.

The door opened and Shizuka came in bristling with anger

“Onii-chan! Rumors about you were already being spread throughout the neighborhood! I heard that today it appeared that Liliana-san and Onii-chan were together and specifically went to the shopping district to engage in a shopping date. Furthermore, you even handed your wallet to her, it’s like you guys are an engaged couple or newlyweds!”

Well, what ensued was an argument. However, it would probably be best not to elaborate the details on this matter.

On the contrary, the problematic issues arose only when he got up the next day.

Just as Godou finished freshening up at six-thirty in the morning, the doorbell rang.

As soon as he opened the door, he saw Yuri wearing her uniform standing right in front of him.

She was carrying a delicately made bento with an embarrassed look all over her face.

"I'm very sorry for disturbing you this early. There is something I must discuss with Godou-san....."

"I usually wake up very early so it is fine, however, what's the problem?"

Godou tensed up at this sudden morning visit.

"Could it be that a god has appeared somewhere?"

"No. It isn't anything like that. Actually, Amakasu-san passed on some information. He said that last night Liliana-san went to Godou-san's house to make dinner."

"H-How does that person know what happened here that night! ?"

Amakasu is a descendant of the ninjas. His intelligence gathering could be described as his forte.....

Once Yuri heard Godou muttering to himself due to the unexpected information that was gathered from him, Yuri's expression slightly stiffened.

"Does that mean it was true?"

"Ah, haha. That girl Liliana seemed to have said 'this kind of task is also part of my job', something like that."

"About that, despite Liliana-san being your number one knight, if you completely rely on her good intentions, wouldn't that feel inappropriate? Especially this time when the housework was to be done by Godou-san."

"I guess you're right....."

Godou lowered his head upon hearing her sincere advice.

"It's different from everyone individually bringing food during the day. Yesterday I was spoiled by Liliana's enthusiasm, however this is actually very bad."

Yuri offered her righteous opinion, but on the contrary, Godou actually rejoiced upon hearing her words.

"Yes. Thank you Mariya. Speaking to me in this manner helps me out a lot. If I'm not capable of doing these type of things myself then that wouldn't be right."

"Ah, no. It is me, I was the one who spoke out of line."

Godou expressed his gratitude while the gentle ojou-sama was panic-stricken.

"I feel like Godou-san is generally a well-behaved person other than your indifference to your own conduct during important events."

Yuri shyly gazed downwards and handed over the contents in her hands.

She handed over the furoshiki that was in her possession the entire time.

"Here you go.....if you don't mind, please accept this."

"What is this?"

"I made some onigiris. If you don't mind, please eat them in place of your lunch."

"I must say, during times like these I feel like I shouldn't completely rely on other people's good intentions. Especially this time since it involves matters related to housework."

Godou repeated his counterpart's argument from before causing Yuri to instantly raise her head.

"T-That's how it should be! What I meant by having a sense of propriety was referring to you having to behave appropriately in other aspects!"

"Even so, that's still....."

"I want to help Godou-san since you still are not used to doing housework. The complications that would arise from this is what I'm concerned about. Those that are close to you would of course share these same feelings of concern. So, if you don't mind then....."

Yuri once again timidly handed over the bento.

Godou felt slightly perplexed but he still accepted it with gratitude. He then said "come in and stay for a bit" to Yuri who was heading directly to school.

Inside the bag were: salmon, plum, and bonito flake rice balls with three of each kind.

They were neatly arranged inside the bento box. Godou immediately thought about making some miso sauce and Yuri offered to help.

Halfway through, Godou's role was reduced to being Mariya's assistant as she showed off how to prepare the Mariya family's miso soup recipe

"Onii-chan.....yesterday it was Liliana-san and now today it's Mariya-senpai, what's going on? Both of them have come early in the morning!"

It was obvious that this was the first thing Shizuka said when she entered the kitchen in the morning.

By the way, Yuri and Liliana also accompanied each other shopping today once they got back from school.

"This issue is entirely the Kusanagi household's problem. Godou-san must work hard to maintain independency."

"The responsibility of assisting the King falls to his retainers. I would rather see him leisurely sit around and watch me complete his tasks."

As they were shopping, the direction of their argument took on the form of neverending parallel lines.

During this time, Liliana's gaze had the endurance of a composer who just found inspiration for a composition or like a poet immersed in writing poetry.

".....No, wait a second. Actually in that aspect there are various. .....residences with newlywed lifestyles where the bride expends a lot of effort in the kitchen preparing dinner. The husband who isn't accustomed to this field wishes to lend a hand. Their gazes accidentally intersect, the young and tender emotions that arises..... .it's exactly like this!"

She nodded with approval as she spoke. Following that, she cleared her throat and said "h-having it this way might not be so bad" and suddenly accepted Yuri's viewpoint.

As a result, when the three of them returned to the Kusanagi house, he started helping the two of them make dinner.

On the way home, Shizuka once again became furious.

After that, the evening of the next day came around.

Erica, who had found this situation to be quite interesting when she heard about it, brought a meat pie personally made by Arianna that had been stored in the kitchen of the Blandelli household. Ena, who roams around like a wandering traveler, also suddenly showed up and brought him two pounds of both brown rice and miso.

Even Yuri and Liliana appeared together at that time――.

During this time, Shizuka placed a picture of her deceased paternal grandmother and spirit tablet on the living room table.

“Onii-chan, come over here and kneel down for a bit. Please put your hand against your chest, then turn around and reflect over what you did recently. Carefully reflect on this for a bit and afterwards apologize to grandma’s departed soul. Ah, hey, I’m not done speaking yet!”

Being forced to do this without realizing what his immoral conduct was, Godou evaded her to reach his room on the second floor in order to take refuge.

The other four people followed him inside. Erica started to snicker, Yuri was completely embarrassed, Liliana still kept her usual earnest expression, and Ena showed no signs of concern――.

“Geez, Shizuka has recently been very irritable.”

"That means even Godou could figure out how to solve this kind of problem. That was quite a difficult task."

Erica commented on Godou who expressed his discontent.

In short, because of these unexpected circumstances it was made possible for his usual friends to all gather together inside Godou's room for the first time.

Since it was an empty and dull room, even after fitting five people in there it unexpectedly didn't feel very cramped.

He took out what appeared to be either a seat cushion or sofa pillow for each person there and all of them appropriately sat down.

"Well then, how capable is your Majesty at cooking?"

"It is hard to say after only one or two days."

Seishuuin Ena's question made Godou wryly smile.

She had arrived in Tokyo not too long ago after recovering from the injuries to her body during the battle against Guinevere.

Ena, who was also honing her cooking capabilities, smiled and said:

"That's perfect. Did Your Majesty go to Yuri and the others for cooking lessons today? Ena also wants to enter and study with Your Majesty."

For the time being I should probably focus on my cooking responsibilities. Godou had this kind of meager resolve.

He didn't want to push his responsibilities on the accommodating Yuri and Liliana since it completely matched the saying, give him an inch and he'll want a mile. As a result, he asked them "can you please teach me the art of cooking".

Nevertheless, in reality there was the restriction of his cooking level being inadequate.

While Godou was dilly dallying, the girls had already decided on some other business to deliberate.

"Oh yeah, it's almost Christmas. Can you teach me how to cook something involving turkey?"

"Will there be an event scheduled for this time of year as social convention dictates? Are you celebrating the holidays together with Shizuka and your mom?"

After Godou freely spoke, he was questioned by Liliana.

"No, there isn't anything special being planned. Well, it just feels like everyday around that time there would be numerous visitors in the house with Shizuka and I. Speaking of which, Nanami and the others previously mentioned that as a guy you have to stay up and party till dawn. Giving that a shot doesn't seem so bad."

"All the way till morning? It sounds like a lot of fun."

"Mariya Yuri. If you say it like that, Kusanagi Godou might actually consider participating."

"Yeah. When you consider this gathering of his and the serious tone he had not too long ago, he is heavily guilty of contradicting himself."

Erica and Liliana's tone hinted a bit of sorrow as they responded to the smiling Yuri.

Afterwards, the silver-haired knight cleared her throat and slowly began to speak.

"I have a suggestion. Even though it sounds a bit ambitious, how about holding a Christmas party and having me be in charge of the invitations?"

"A party.....It has been quite peaceful recently so it sounds like a pretty good idea."

Her suggestion came quite suddenly but Godou nevertheless heavily nodded in response.

However, today was December 9th. It hasn't even been half a month since the battle with Lancelot. Knowing how long this kind of tranquility will last was quite an enigmatic matter.

"Well, I'm guessing it would be quite good to occasionally host a gathering for our group."

Erica winked as she stated her opinion.

Her manner of speaking really seemed to indicate she was already used to attending parties.

"Ah, however, can a miko normally celebrate Christmas?"

"Overall what we do isn't that strict. However....."

Yuri wryly smiled towards Godou's inquiry. Afterwards she slightly became at a loss for words.

"However?"

"Kaoru-san is amazing whenever it reaches this time of the year . Starting from the twentieth, she would have dates with girls every single day. Amazing people should behave like this, completely unfazed even when faced with the nagging of elders."

Ena continued where her friend left off and explained to Godou.

Speaking of Kaoru, the girl she takes as her partner on a date is definitely swapped every day. She has even developed the ultimate skill of having Christmas dates with three separate people within the same day.

"Guess it would be best to not invite her....."

"Since she is someone who likes to be rowdy, I suspect she would still show up for a bit. However the problem lies on Ena's behalf. Every year around this time Ena will head to the mountains to spend the holidays."

“Hey Seishuuin, about those religious practices in the mountains, are you able to get a head start on it?”

Ena clasped her hands and said “ah, I see” in response to Godou’s question.

To the rigid Hime-miko of the Sword who wasn’t used to having a good time, Godou couldn’t help but smile.

Seeing this, Yuri exposed a graceful smile and Erica elegantly glanced over everyone as if she was a noblewoman. Even though Liliana was the person who had to invite other people and act as the host, she was still very happy.

Just like this, the early parts of December have indeed been very peaceful for Godou and company.

At this time, the person who brought the doom and gloom was the martial artist Lu Yinghua——no, instead it was someone in this world whom he feared the most, someone whom he was most humble to, a person whom he was in contact with that was deemed the most supreme tyrant.

Part 2

"I've brought a message from Master."

The current location was the VIP room of the Akihabara maid-themed tea house, the "Peerless Statesman."

Lu Yinghua spoke gloomily as soon as he spotted Godou.

Fourteen years old. A handsome youth with a slim but not particularly tall physique. Nevertheless, an unmistakable sense of arrogance hung on his face the same way dark circles below the eyes could not be concealed.

Besides Kusanagi Godou, Sayanomiya Kaoru and Amakasu Touma also happened to be present in the room.

Those two were currently playing baccarat on one of the card game tables.

"From Nee-san? What a rare occasion."

The unexpected report livened up Godou's spirits.

It was currently after 10pm on the ninth of December after his discussion with the girls about the party. After a lively dinner with everyone, Godou had received a call from Lu Yinghua informing him "I just got back."

Lu Yinghua had apparently made a trip back to Hong Kong for some reason.

Hearing that he was back in Akihabara, Godou looked forward to meeting him again.

"Come to think of it, I haven't contacted her all this time."

The sworn elder sister Luo Cuilian. Style name Hao.[14] The one people addressed as Her Eminence Luo Hao. As well as being Lu Yinghua's master, she was the leader of the Holy Cult of the Five Mountains. Friendship between gentlemen was as insipid as water [15] -- she was one who lived according to this principle. Consequently, even though she and Godou were sworn siblings they did not have frequent contact. In fact, this was the first time Godou heard from her since parting at Nikkou.

"During my recent visit to the Mount Lu convent, Master suddenly said the following."

In a remote corner on the sacred peaks of Mount Emei, looking up at the moonlit sky.

The transcendent beauty who rivaled the moon fairy was declaring in a beautiful voice as melodic as a musical instrument.

'Perhaps it would be a pleasant experience to admire the beauty of the moon together on occasion, just the two of us, siblings bound by oath. My young eagle, I have a mission for you. You must take care and accomplish it as if it was your job.'

Hearing the demonic cult leader's statement retold, Kaoru and Amakasu exchanged glances.

"Considering it's Her Eminence, would things really be over with just moon watching?"

"Hey don't slander her. Even though she's someone who can't be left alone in urban areas, I think she's quite affectionate in certain ways -- Eh, am I wrong?"

With a wry expression, Godou objected to the two History Compilation Committee members who were both older than him.

Standing next to Godou, Lu Yinghua shook his head with a complicated expression on his face.

"Listen to me carefully, Honored Uncle. If five or ten years had passed since you last parted, then sure, her words might seem a little plausible. But less than two months? Master in particular, cannot possibly desire a reunion with her sworn little brother simply because she misses you!"

Stated in no uncertain terms, a depressing sense of truth.

"I can guarantee with an oath, something suspicious is definitely going on!"

"Decidedly..."

"In any case, allow me to deliver this to Honored Uncle first. Master's orders are to drink it up during the next full moon."

Lu Yinghua handed over a little bottle containing a liquid that looked like mercury.

"What'll happen if I drink it?"

"I expect it will lead to all kinds of trouble. Drinking it results in instant transportation to Mount Lu where Master resides."

Godou shrugged in response to this rather problematic explanation that left great room for elaboration.

Well, it's not like I'll die -- thought Godou to himself. Accepting the bottle and putting it away, he said:

"When's the next full moon?"

"It happens to be tomorrow..."

Tonight, I'm gonna meet my elder sister in China--

Godou announced to the girls during lunch the next day. "No ordinary meeting for sure" was Erica's response. Saying that, she sighed. As for Yuri, she pleaded "You must return safe and sound" with a grave expression. On the other hand, Liliana offered her assurance, promising "In the event of unforeseeable tragedy, I will take good care of little sister Shizuka."

Godou sent a text message to inform Ena who was currently training in Chichibu.

'Please tell me about your experiences throughout the journey. However, it'd be best if you don't die.'

Her reply did not seem like she was joking at all.

In any case, Godou could agree with her response in certain ways.

"Compared to tigers in human form, Nee-san sure is ten thousand times more fearsome..."

Godou muttered as he walked over to Shinjuku's Kabukichou[16] district during dusk.

It did not feel appropriate to wear school uniform on this bustling street, so naturally, Godou had changed into casual clothing. He made his way to the address of a multi-tenant building. The office of Hong Kong's Lu family was located on the top floor of this building, and Lu Yinghua apparently had a room there for conducting daily affairs.

Anyway, today's destination was the rooftop of this building.

Lu Yinghua was waiting right there. Furthermore, this nephew's male subordinates were using chalk to inscribe on the floor of the roof geometric shapes and patterns with lots of Chinese characters written on them.

"We welcome your grand arrival, Honored Uncle. We are now preparing the magic circle."

Godou nodded to acknowledge Lu Yinghua's martial arts salute , then waited for ten-odd minutes.

By the time the circle was complete, the evening sun had already set and the sky had turned completely dark. Godou stood in the center of the circle with only Lu Yinghua by his side.

Mustering his determination, Godou drank the bottle of silver liquid he had received earlier.

His first reaction was that it tasted really bad. A kind of indescribable taste rivaling Arianna's efforts in pot-stewed cuisine. Furthermore, the instant he swallowed this viscous fluid, an exceptional sense of scorching heat seemed to be spreading from his stomach.

This liquid's effects were apparently quite astounding.

It seemed to be the medium for applying Daoist arts to Godou all the way from distant Mount Lu.

Due to the discomfort in his throat and the scorching feeling in his stomach, Godou collapsed to his knees on the floor of the rooftop. In that very instant...

He was transported. The surrounding scenery of the Kabukichou building rooftop gradually dissipated and Godou found himself no longer crouching on the rooftop of the multi-tenant building in Kubukichou.

'Much time have passed since our last parting, my little brother.'

"Nee-san...?"

Hearing the beautiful voice he missed so much, Godou groaned .

Enduring the discomfort in his throat and stomach, Godou stood up with great difficulty and surveyed his surroundings.

This place was deep in mountains he had never been to, and consequently never seen before. Also, he had not been sent to the foot or even midway up the mountain.

Situated on one of the peaks of Mount Emei, this place was at substantial altitude. Godou was standing on a protrusion of rock that resembled an observation platform and offered a wide expansive view of the neighboring mountains and the world below.

The greenery at the foot of various mountains, together with the swathes of white snow near the mountaintops, looked as if they were far off in the distance.

Turning his gaze up, Godou could see the sky filled with twinkling stars.

"I can't see you, where are you?"

"Honored Uncle. Master is simply projecting her voice from far away."

As Godou looked around for signs of Luo Cuilian, Lu Yinghua informed him.

The nephew proceeded to kneel on one knee and salute with one fist against an open palm.

"Master's might and virtue, rivaling the sun in the sky, becomes ever more dazzling for each passing day. Your disciple Lu Yinghua reports his return, and at the same time, offers wishes of eternal longevity to wise and valorous Master."

Godou was immensely impressed by how far Lu Yinghua went with these words of flattery.

Luo Cuilian's unique and wonderful voice was heard once more . But her message was exceedingly merciless.

'My young eagle, thank you for accomplishing your task. Now go back to your training for I have prepared a suitable opponent. You shall be lauded if you achieve victory in one day. You pass if you do it in two. If it takes you three days... Hmph, then I shall personally give you a good schooling. Nothing else needs to be said.'

Luo Cuilian had infused a certain power into these quiet words. Namely, the [Dragon's Roar and Tiger's Howl].

The authority to turn her voice into shockwaves of wind. The current level of force was probably strong enough to send a light vehicle flying.

"----!"

Surrounded by the intangible shockwave, Lu Yinghua took a great leap backwards and crossed his arms in an X-shape to protect himself. True to the name of the promising young star of the martial realm.

Dodging the full brunt of the force, he was instead blown into the night sky between the mountains. Furthermore, the magical wind continued to blow, pushing him further and further back in the air.

"Oowaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaah...!"

For the very first time, Godou heard the pitiful screams of his arrogant nephew.

Lu Yinghua was blown away like a kite whose string was severed, falling somewhere amongst the peaks of the mountain range.

"This really doesn't look good for Yinghua..."

'Do not worry. I have already summoned an appropriate opponent to the place where this child will land. Leave him be for now.'

Luo Cuilian answered Godou's comment on a completely different wavelength.

Was the scene that just transpired an everyday occurrence for this master-disciple pair? Whether the disciple who could instantly react to any situation, or the master who imposed her expectations upon him, neither were normal.

Ooooooooaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaaooooooooo....

Hearing the rumbling roars of a magical beast in the far distance , Godou spoke up:

"Could that be Yinghua's opponent?"

'Yes. Hoho... Even though I said two days would earn a pass, from what I can tell, he passes if he can hunt and kill this formidable foe within four days. So, how well will my young eagle perform?'

The demonic cult leader uttered words that had long transcended the realm of strictness.

Godou remarked "she really is someone like that" as he nodded, praying to the heavens for Yinghua's safety.

'So, little brother. Come up directly along the mountain path. Your elder sister has been waiting impatiently.'

Urged by the voice of his sworn elder sister, Godou got off the rock that resembled an observation platform.

He proceeded to ascend the mountain path. This place should be somewhere in the Lushan National Park in China's Jiangxi

province. The sky was filled with stars and constellations without being shrouded by a single cloud. A completely clear and lucid night sky.

This splendorous canopy of radiant starlight was a view one could not find in gloomy urban environments.

"Since we are here to admire the full moon, I guess it's lucky the sky is not overcast."

'In accordance with prior wishes, I had the clouds blown away beforehand. Chasing after a cloud-hidden moon could be amusing at times. Nevertheless, tonight is the reunion of we sworn siblings after our two-month separation. Truly, taking place beneath the bright full moon is most ideal, hence those impertinent clouds have been driven away for this occasion.'

Godou was merely remarking on something he noticed, but little did he expect such a surprising answer.

She turned out to be even more counter to common logic than imagined... Godou thought to himself emphatically as he conversed with the sworn elder sister's voice. Soon after, he reached a pavilion.

In an open area in the mountain, a little house with only a roof and no walls had been built here.

The transcendent beauty in front of this pavilion was the Campione who stood as the Ruler of the Martial Realm.

"You have arrived without trouble, my little brother, Kusanagi Godou!"

In this fashion, the sworn elder sister and younger brother were reunited after two months.

Part 3

Family name Luo. Given name Cuilian. Style name Hao.

Despite having passed the age of two hundred, she still possessed the beautiful appearance of a late teen. Hers was beauty that put nature to shame and could bring nations to ruin. Indeed, such incomparable beauty of hers was truly transcendent.

Tonight, she was dressed in Han Chinese clothing, in a style reminiscent of a heavenly goddess.

The elegance of her long flowing sleeves and lightly floating hemlines gave one an illusion of having arrived at the heavenly emperor's palace.

But in actual fact, she was the warrior standing at the martial pinnacle and the Daoist priestess who had reached the peak of Daoist mastery. Ingrained in her body were arts and knowledge completely surpassing all other Campiones.

"Why don't you relax? Sit or lie down, whichever you want. Should you tire of moon watching, we can have a quiet

conversation throughout the night. Hoho, as Devil Kings, it is not a bad idea to enjoy ourselves in a style in tribute to the Seven Sages." [17]

Making such a suggestion, Luo Cuilian lowered herself on her own.

And sat down on a white tiger(!) rug that had been laid over the floor of the pavilion.

Another similar rug could be seen, most likely prepared for her sworn little brother. Godou was currently wearing a winter coat, but it was merely one intended for use in Tokyo. At the top of a mountain at such high altitudes, it was completely ineffective.

Chilling mountain air seeped into his clothes, mercilessly robbing Godou of his body warmth.

To be honest, the tiger fur rug was truly a blessing. Godou immediately bent down and sat cross-legged. At the very least, this should help keep his legs and lower torso warm.

Running his hand through the striped pattern of the white tiger fur rug, it felt extremely smooth.

"Was this really skinned from an actual tiger...?"

"Who knows? These were simply offered in tribute by members of the holy cult some time ago. I'm not really aware of the details."

The sworn elder sister's uncertain answer fully convinced Godou instead. It was definitely the real thing.

He could not imagine anyone foolish enough to offer something inauthentic to Her Eminence Luo Hao.

"If you're hungry, please enjoy some of these dishes. In order to receive you as a guest, your elder sister ended her long absence from the kitchen, bringing to life her arts of the kitchen knife once more."

"Eh? Nee-san cooked personally!?"

Luo Cuilian lightly waved her hand before Godou as he watched in shock.

Immediately, a number of large dishes appeared between them. Laden upon them were three brightly-colored specimens of Chinese cuisine.

The first dish seemed to be thick pork slices heaped over leafy vegetables.

The second dish consisted of ten-odd springrolls arranged in a triangular shape. For some reason, the pastry wrappers were red in color.

The third dish consisted of clear transparent soup. Even the wrappers of the floating dumplings in the soup were transparent, and they seemed to hold fillings made of diced meat and vegetables. Unbelievably, the fillings contained all seven colors of

the rainbow: red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo and violet, giving a bright and colorful display like a kaleidoscope.

"...Nee-san turns out to be someone really talented at cooking."

Godou remarked emphatically in admiration. Every dish without exception was astoundingly phenomenal.

This was not simply limited to taste. Even the appearance exhibited artistic flair like the creative masterpieces of a master chef. Combined with the extraordinary aroma, the visual impact truly made the viewer look forward to the excellent taste.

"You absolutely must not disclose to others these skills possessed by Luo Cuilian. Even though I once underwent training as befitted a daughter of the Luo family, I am now the Ruler of the Martial Realm. Putting on a show in the kitchen does not really suit my stature."

Accepting the sworn little brother's praise, Luo Cuilian smiled with satisfaction.

"Expressly going against principles for the sake of offering hospitality to a sworn little brother. Hohoho, even though it was fairly time consuming, the result turned out to be surprisingly favorable."

Faced with this incredible cuisine, Godou eschewed modesty and took up his chopsticks. First he went for the thickly sliced meat.

Amazing! The pork was actually sliced to millimeter thickness then piled dozens of layers together in a manner akin to mille-feuille . The texture was such that it melted in the palate as if it were snow, dissolving into a rich meaty flavor.

Next were the red springrolls. The crispy surface offered the sweet taste of carrots.

The springrolls contained a sweet-tasting sauce. The fillings had a mixture of several types of tubers with thickening added. The complex and wonderful interplay of differing sweet tastes immersed the tongue in pleasure without being overwhelming.

Then there was the secret recipe of transparent soup and rainbow-colored dumplings.

Sipping the soup, a marvelously cool taste of sourness brought a great refreshing feeling to the palate. Biting into a rainbow dumpling, the delicious taste of meat and fish, together with the savory flavor of a great assortment of vegetables played a harmonious symphony upon the taste buds.

Godou was completely unable to fathom what ingredients and cooking processes had been used to produce these marvelous creations.

"Hmm. These are all wonderfully delicious without exception. It's amazing."

Godou offered praise and admiration without flattery as he rapidly busied his chopsticks and his mouth.

"Is it possible that you cook for Yinghua occasionally?"

"Ridiculous. Cooking for the master is part of a disciple's training. Reversal of the master-disciple relationship is not permitted. Tonight is the first occasion for me to step into the kitchen in seventy years."

"...I see."

Was this kind of life the reason his "nephew" became so depressed?

This subtle thought occurred to Godou as he savored the magnificent cuisine. All things considered, he was currently enjoying rare cuisine as uncommon as the occurrence of Haley's comet.

Anyway, just as Godou finished the dishes offered as part of the sworn elder sister's hospitality...

Luo Cuilian casually took out the moon guitar[18] that had been placed by her side.

As her fingernails strummed away gently, a heavenly melody seemed to fill the clear atmosphere. The quick rhythm of her singing resounded as if following the sounds of the instrument.

> Placing the *qin* on a curved stand,
> And sitting tranquil beside it, emotions contained.
> Why trouble to pluck or strum it?
> The wind on the strings makes it sound itself. [19]

She probably played simply as the mood dictated rather than showing off her talents.

Humming casually like an ordinary person, she strummed the musical instrument with her nails. But even in such an act, Luo Cuilian displayed mastery unsurpassed by anyone in the entire world.

Even though he was the only audience, Godou wanted to continue listening along, mesmerized.

But it was probably time for him to ask. About the matter her disciple went so far as to assert as "definitely" suspicious.

"Nee-san. Do you have something you want to tell me?"

Godou's probing question caused the sworn elder sister's hand to pause in her playing.

"Now that you brought it up, yes, that is my intention. I wanted to recount an old tale."

"An old tale?"

"Back then, I was already the Ruler of the Martial Realm, but due to various matters I was traveling in the ancient kingdom of the Turks."

"Come to think of it, you recently came expressly to Japan as well."

"Over there, I chanced upon a rare divine artifact. Yes, a precious item which had the ability to give birth to [Heretic Gods] and release them upon the world."

"--A divine artifact that can give birth to gods!?"

Divine artifacts, were objects similar to grimoires which had been etched with heavenly wisdom and the laws of sacred spells.

It was common for them to possess the attribute of immortal indestructibility. These were objects that were very difficult to dispose of once they manifested on earth.

"After a convoluted series of events, I finally defeated the god that had manifested, and sealed the divine artifact's power."

"Ah... That's great news."

Godou was relieved to hear the sworn elder sister recount her past victory nonchalantly.

"As a safety precaution, I took the sealed divine artifact back with me and kept it for the time being."

The conversation seemed to be taking an ominous turn.

"A few days ago, I noticed the divine artifact had started recovering its powers at some unknown point in time, and was once again about to produce a [Heretic God]."

"Shouldn't you get rid of such a dangerous divine artifact right away instead!?"

He could already guess what Luo Cuilian was about to say.

But Godou suppressed the worry in his heart and went with the flow, probing further. No matter how unprecedented the actions of this sworn elder sister were, he never expected the extent--

And so, the beautiful demonic cult leader, showed an acute expression like a great general leading a million troops into battle.

"Of course not. What the divine artifact created was only a being less than a [Heretic God]. That kind of weak enemy is completely unworthy of receiving even a palm strike from me, Luo Cuilian. Dealing directly with that kind of opponent would be a taint to my honor."

The sworn elder sister who prompted Godou's ominous premonitions, followed up with this kind of statement.

"Godou. Your insight as a king still seems rather inadequate. You need to reflect properly on this."

"No, no, wait a minute. So Nee-san did you ignore that being less than a [Heretic God]? The thing created by that divine artifact! What happened to it next?"

"Hoho. Your elder sister was not careless. Naturally, there was a plan."

The sworn elder sister displayed an arrogant smile.

Not only did Godou's ominous premonition not subside, it became even stronger. From his experience, it was certain that Luo Cuilian would proceed to reveal something completely beyond his expectations--

"The divine artifact wishes to bring vengeance upon me. However, slaughtering that loser would taint the honor of me, Luo Cuilian. And so I communicated the following to the other party."

Alas, this was the key sentence. As expected.

"My sworn little brother, Kusanagi Godou, is located at the Japanese capital of Tokyo. If you wish to have a rematch with me, Luo Hao, defeat my younger brother first to demonstrate your strength. Then we shall see."

"I knew it... At least tell me beforehand."

As Godou hung his head, the sworn elder sister smiled gently in return.

"This comes from your elder sister's vast love, to bestow upon you this trial with a merciful heart. Riding upon this victory, you shall continue along the glorious path of heroism."

"Well, since the situation has already come to this, there's no other way around it."

Wow, my adaptability is surely surprising. Greatly impressed by himself, Godou said:

"Even though I know only two names out of the gods slain by Nee-san, it really seems like you fought many gods in the past."

To Godou's knowledge, Luo Cuilian's victories included an Om pair of Buddha Guardians and the goddess Gayatri.

Well, this was the sworn elder sister after all. It felt like she had fought all sorts of gods in the past.

"Yes. The name of the god I slew a century and a half ago is Saturnus.[20] A god from the Roman Empire and associated with land and harvest. Furthermore--"

"Furthermore?"

"Although I get the sense there were all sorts of causes, I've forgotten them."

Recounting her victory, Luo Cuilian asserted thus.

As for this statement, rather than her memories of the past had faded over time, it would be more accurate to say she never had any intention to reminisce over her past battles.

"The divine artifact seeks revenge... Nee-san, didn't you mention that just now?"

"Correct. The divine artifact, [Crown of Saturnalia]. Even though it is not a living object it can carry a conversation. An

existence infused with divine qualities to a certain extent. Since this sacred vessel displays will and perception, perhaps it is possessed by some kind of spirit."

"The same kind of existence as Ama no Murakumo!"

Well, even if it was also made by the gods, Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi must be ranked on a much higher level.

However, there was no doubt the artifact was a troublesome existence.

After that, Godou was once again given "that elixir."

The secret elixir which resembled mercury, said to be concocted personally by the sworn elder sister.

Informed that he would return to Tokyo by drinking it, Godou had no choice but to obey. Immediately, enchanted with the demonic cult leader's instantaneous transportation technique of [Terrain Reduction], Godou found himself crouching on the rooftop of the mixed ethnic building in Kubukichou.

Naturally, Lu Yinghua was not present. He was still in the middle of his special training(?) at Mount Lu.

After arriving back in Tokyo, Godou did not return home at once. Instead he instantly contacted his usual friends. A troublesome foe was apparently coming to Tokyo to defeat Kusanagi Godou -- was what he told them.

"More accurately, it has already arrived."

Deep into the night after Godou's return to Tokyo from Mount Lu, an emergency meeting was being held at the Sayanomiya residence.

The one who spoke in an awkward tone of voice was Amakasu. Even though Ena was not present due to her mountain training, Erica, Yuri and Liliana had all hurried here. Obviously, Kaoru was also present.

"Indeed. More than enough time has already elapsed for it to travel here."

Kaoru agreed with her subordinate's opinion.

"But didn't Yuri fail to sense any divine presence?"

"Yes. I have not had that kind of feeling at all lately."

The Hime-Miko confirmed Erica's question with great confidence.

"Produced by the divine artifact, also something not a god -- something less than a [Heretic God], that was what Her Eminence said?"

Liliana asked for confirmation, prompting Godou to nod and grumble:

"Ah yes. Exactly that. Damn it, do I really need to go over there to ask Nee-san for more details?"

"What do you expect to happen? Considering Her Eminence, even if Godou goes there with a list of questions, I don't think she will properly tell us everything we want to know."

"That's right. In this regard, even Lu Yinghua can only face her in panic."

Godou agreed with the red and blue knights' comments.

Come to think of it, even for the youth who knew the demonic cult leader best, "face her in panic" was the best he could do.

"Regarding Heretic Saturnus, let's start investigating from other avenues."

Erica proposed as if trying to brighten the mood.

"Even though it was a battle between a [Heretic God] and a Campione that occurred a century and a half ago, it is very likely that records have been left behind by people near the scene and involved in the world of magic. I will contact Milan's [Copper Black Cross] to begin urgent investigations."

"That's right. Turkey is actually not too far away from Italy."

Godou recalled it was a place regarded as the boundary between Europe and Asia.

Thus ended the meeting that night, and the next day arrived.

Amakasu had History Compilation Committee members running around all over Tokyo, but no clues concerning the divine artifact [Crown of Saturnalia] had been found yet.

Without the arrival of spirit visions, Yuri's repeated meditation did not bear any fruit in obtaining divine revelation.

Liliana also attempted to use witchcraft to investigate, but did not obtain any results.

But there was other good news. Godou received a call from Lu Yinghua through his cellphone.

"You're safe and sound, Yinghua!"

'Yeah I suppose. Pursuing each other with that troublesome monster that Master had found from goodness knows where, running all over the mountain made me half dead with exhaustion . I'm now taking advantage of the chaotic situation... no, resting near the foot of Mount Lu.'

Despite having the disposition of an extraordinary genius prodigy, he was such a crafty and slippery customer.

'That's what Master said. If I can't defeat it completely, I will surely suffer a fatal counterattack from that monster. I have no choice but to defeat it in a slow but sure manner."

Like master, like disciple? Godou felt like Yinghua always had the ability to see through the master's bluffs.

Even though Godou was greatly impressed by Yinghua's sharp perceptions, he still decided to go ahead and inquire about the matter.

"So Yinghua, what kind of monster is the enemy?"

"Uh, its body looks like some kind of cross between a tiger and a bull, plus wings as well as fur like a hedgehog. Its howls are similar to a dog's. Can swallow a man whole in one bite. Cannot be hunted down like a normal tiger..."

What he described was an unimaginable monster, supplemented further by a few outrageous statements.

Yinghua definitely hunted tigers barehanded. Concluding that to himself, Godou listened as Lu Yinghua continued:

'Not only is it vicious, it's also quite smart. A crafty fellow that cannot be underestimated. What about this monster?"

"Defeat it as quickly as possible. Even a day earlier would be good. Then report immediately back to Nee-san."

Godou was well aware he was issuing difficult orders.

Then he briefly outlined the issue with Saturnus that had happened so far.

"If you can say some good things to Nee-san, wouldn't you be able to find out roughly what happened a hundred and fifty years

ago, as well as the nature of that god? We need as much information as possible, every detail counts. I know it's tough, but you're the only one I can rely on."

'S-Since it is Honored Uncle's orders, of course I will put forth my best effort into it.'

Far away in distant Mount Lu, the nephew replied in a trembling voice.

'This is very challenging on many levels. Whether hunting the prey, or the task after the hunt. In fact, the latter is three times harder than the former... Nevertheless, whatever, I will try to find a solution.'

"I am counting on you."

'However, the surroundings of Master's convent include not only the depths of Mount Lu, but also a forbidden area sealed away by Master's barrier. There's no network since cellphone signals are out of reception, and even electricity, gas and running water are absent. So I will be out of contact for now. Please understand.'

Indeed, such a description brought to mind natural reserves in Japan such as Yakushima[21] or Shirakami-Sanchi.[22]

Recalling where the reunion with his sworn elder sister had taken place, Godou immediately understood.

'After all, it's a place where I can't even bring in gaming devices for killing time. There was one time when I brought a satellite cellphone and it was mercilessly crushed. Master truly believes that the decline of modern countries began with the invention of the steam engine.'

"That's even earlier than Edison's invention of electrical power distribution..."

'If something requires me to go to the village to handle, I'll secretly try to send a progress report by computer. Anyway, I don't expect many opportunities for that either.'

"Then just try your best without breaking the rules."

'That's good enough. I just need to borrow without asking for a minute or two.'

Offering mild advice to the foster nephew seemed to have secured a confident guarantee instead.

'Oh by the way, if Honored Uncle wishes to contact me while I'm at Mount Lu, please feel free to give orders to my subordinates over at Shinjuku. So, Honored Uncle, Yinghua takes his leave.'

News from Erica came a few minutes after Lu Yinghua's call ended.

The manifestation of the [Heretic God] Saturnus in Turkey a hundred and fifty years ago. Members of the [Copper Black Cross] had successfully confirmed the sacred fruit he had left behind on earth.

Part 4

A small package was sent from the faraway place of Istanbul using Mailing magic.

The sender was Erica's friend who resided in Turkey's largest metropolis, Istanbul. He easily attained the desired results when he was dispatched to the country where the demonic cult leader's previous battle took place to investigate its traces.

The first stop of his investigation took place within Turkey's records which recorded a 200 year period of heretic god appearances.

His focus was on the recorded history from 138 years ago where a god appeared in the Anatolia[23] plains, so he immediately went to the scene of that occurrence. By interviewing an elderly magician, he was fortunate to find out that his father was also an investigator for the battle in this region.

Therefore, he immediately proceeded to hear out his father's investigation.

In the end, he had learned from those records that it was basically something along the lines of a fight between an earth god and some Campione.

However, he was fortunate to ensure himself that the fruits could be brought back as data.

It appeared that after receiving this report, Erica immediately contacted him.

“Don’t worry about whether or not it’s ethical at this time. You can do it however you want it, just quickly send the fruits over here to me!”

As a result, the little box holding the fruits was sent to her with astonishing speed.

It was said that these were the sacred fruits left behind by the heretic god Saturnus in the past. Yuri, who came into contact with the item, finally received a spirit vision.

“The Crown of Saturnalia. The divine artifact giving rise to Heretic Saturnus is presently located at that place.”

In accordance to Yuri’s guidance, Amakasu quickly drove off to Kasai Rinkai Park.

The place where it took root was reportedly located not too far from here on the surface of the sea——.

Actually, currently it was the night of December 11th, the day after Godou visited Lushan by himself.

"Within such a short time frame, we were able to arrive at the designated location right away."

Godou muttered with mixed feelings while riding on the patrol boat borrowed by the History Compilation Committee through their connections to the Japanese Coast Guard.

Thus, the need to issue such inconsiderate orders towards Lu Yinghua might arise again.

After depressingly thinking over this, Erica, who had a facial expression indicating this was as it should be, exaggeratedly said:

"This is just Kusanagi Godou enhancing his formation. Even if you carefully selected six or seven of the most elite figures in all of the magic guilds from around the world, you won't find any place that can match us right? Our battle strength, investigation ability, spirit vision, magic power, negotiating skills, and intelligence gathering are all very outstanding."

Erica, Yuri, Liliana, Ena, Amakasu, Kaoru, and Lu Yinghua were all considered as part of his group.

Godou thought about these friends of his that he had grown accustomed to and nodded his head.

After surveying each of the aforementioned people, everyone was clearly not some type of superhuman (although there were

many who possessed a high likelihood of becoming that sort of person). However, it is worth mentioning that the comprehensive strength of entire group was probably at a very high level and balanced.

"Well, nevertheless you will be subjected to danger when your opponent is a god....."

"In our case, we practically had no confrontations with strange occurrences or magicians."

Liliana wryly smiled as she replied to Godou's thoughts.

The scene consisted of Godou, who was the leader, and the knights from Milan. Plus, there was another member in the patrol boat who was a friend of theirs.

"But Godou-san, is it ok to not inform Ena-san about this situation?"

"Uh huh, this isn't some auspicious matter, we don't even know what will happen."

"W-What do you mean?"

"If something unexpected were to happen to us, there would have to be someone else to deal with the aftermath.....the most appropriate person would probably be Seishuuin right?"

Godou felt his own words were a meaningless assurance as he spoke.

This was of course the worst outcome. However, if in the remote chance it did happen then it would be all over. In fact, for this very reason, Amakasu and Kaoru were not with them on the patrol boat. Relevant members should take precautions so they are not all wiped out.....

"Based on how she is, even if you request her to wait for the perfect opportunity over there, she will follow her own authority and come down from the mountain. For the time being we shouldn't let her know."

"S-So it's like that....."

She must have remembered the personality of her childhood hime-miko friend.

Yuri's expression seemed to have suddenly tensed after reluctantly agreeing to that statement.

"I sense the aura of the previously envisioned Crown. Everyone please be careful."

It looks like they were quickly approaching their destination. Not only did Godou nod in response, but Erica and Liliana did as well.

Afterwards, everyone was finally confronted with the Crown of Saturnalia.

Rooted in the surface of the sea near Kasai was an emblem made out of stone. The shape of it only resembled a sizable bird with its wings spread open.

Suddenly, what appeared to be a parasitic tree grew on top of this bird.

Furthermore, it was progressively increasing in size. In the blink of an eye, a 1000 year old giant tree——no, a divine tree emerged.

The divine tree's trunk and branches permeated with hostility towards the Campione.

In addition, it began releasing a very powerful incantation. It clearly wanted to combat Godou.

"I never would've thought the day I would have to fight a tree would arrive....."

Moreover, it was on the surface of the sea in Tokyo Bay. There really must be a limit to the absurdity that occurs.

Looking up at the majestic sight of the ferocious dignified colossal tree from the deck of the patrol boat, Godou calmly whispered.

"Is this basically the sprout of that heretic god Nee-san mentioned?"

"Who knows, there's barely any viable data to make a judgment ."

"In that case, it would be best for the person who can determine what it is to examine it. Hey Yuri——Yuri? What's wrong?"

Liliana kept to her own judgment. Erica on the other hand intended to entrust the evaluating to another person.

Godou and the others noticed it. The body of the hime-miko stiffened as she stared at the thing in front of her. Standing on a branch of the divine tree was something wrapped in a grey sailcloth!

For the time being it could be said its stance had a human-like appearance. Resembling a blanket or coat, the grey sailcloth was wrapped around his entire body.

Just as its name implied, the Grey One had absolutely none of its flesh exposed.

"A spirit.....no, don't tell me it is a divine spirit!? Is it a divine being who served a god in the past.....?"

Did she sense something? Yuri gazed at the Grey One in astonishment.

After receiving the hime-miko's attentive gaze, he dramatically rotated his body and hollered:

'Oi oi. Miko from the island of the world's farthest reaches! I beseech you to stop gazing upon my unsightly fall from grace!'

A very coarse ear piercing sound was made. It would give people the impression of an indescribable, artificial way of speaking.

'It was humiliating, a history full of defeat. In ancient times, I retreated in defeat as I was chased from the throne. However, now there emerges a new king as a replacement!'

The words he spoke simply looked like it was for self-entertainment.

"You are the strange crown——the divine artifact's willpower, a guardian spirit. You intend to retaliate against cult leader Luo Hao right?"

Godou tried calling out towards the Grey One who was sitting on a branch on the divine tree.

'True! True! My latest defeat was bestowed upon me by that beautiful godslayer. I sent an invitation to that person. I challenged her to battle once again!'

The Grey One shouted as he leaned back and squirmed.

Erica and Liliana both sent an eye signal to each other. Yuri on the other hand unsteadily gazed at him. At first glance his appearance would seem quite comical, however the other party was the embodiment of a supernatural existence! The girls couldn't help but feel nervous.

‘However, this is a complete surprise! My challenge had been declined. Instead, I get a young godslayer as a substitute! That would be you, Kusanagi Godou. My new challenge is now directed towards you!'

"No thanks. As far as I am concerned, I hope you can leave immediately."

Godou felt awkward as he spoke.

"Any battle arrangement with me is just Nee-san's doing.”

'Incorrect. I was comfortably overseeing the gathering of the people's essence and energy to build up power, thereby allowing my sprout to awaken as the new Saturnus!'

The Grey One hinted at the colossal tree he was sitting on.

This tree's sprout——is the sprout of a heretic god? Godou's gaze intensified.

'Please, in the near future go to my divine heir, heretic Saturnus, and do battle, Kusanagi Godou!'

Perhaps this is the first time a god related member has issued a request.

Godou frowned while being astonished at the same time.

'Ever since that defeat in the distant past, I have become a degenerate god. However, during this festive occasion, I can still

gather divine power with this deteriorating body——. Ha ha ha, a grand festival is needed to awaken this ancient frenzy so it can challenge you godslayers! Furthermore, more time is required!'

"What the hell, after all this....."

Godou sighed as he gazed at the Grey One who revealed an evil smile.

Requesting a godslayer to let it finish its preparations in peace, the Grey One appeared to be an underling to that divine artifact. Based on his frivolous manner of speaking, he doesn't seem very bright. Instead, a dunce would be a suitable description.

However, since it's like this——. Godou took a deep breath.

He might as well display his own strength to make him quickly leave Tokyo.

"The one unblunted and unapproachable! Smashing covenants, sinners be purged by the iron hammer of justice!"

Suddenly the Boar was summoned. Its target was the gigantic divine tree right in front of them.

Even though there was naturally some hesitation due to the potential destruction, this supernatural event quickly happened within a couple seconds. Overcoming his guilty conscience was a very easy thing to do.

As a result, a swirling flame of darkness immediately appeared in front of the divine tree. The flames turned into a giant black boar.

Aaaaooooooooooh!!

The Boar let out a frightening roar as it suddenly charged towards the divine tree. Like a spear, the tusks penetrated the tree bark and smashed the tree trunk apart with relative ease.

As expected, the Grey One, who was located on the tree branch, lost his foothold.

He gracefully lept into the air. To one's surprise, he remained suspended in midair.

'——Oi Oi. Well done godslayer. Such a show of might, absolutely marvelous. However!'

After the Boar crushed the divine tree and returned, the Grey One commended him without any worry at all.

Immediately after that, the area surrounding him was suddenly permeated with a mist as he was hovering in the air. His sailcloth enwrapped posture was hidden.

'Due to my power restriction, I believe I had no means of dealing with that!'

A beam of light appeared from within the mist. Once again, a giant tree started to emerge from the emblem on the surface of the sea.

Just like that, a new divine tree was grown within a matter of seconds!

'Even if you dismember the new sprout, I'll just continuously revive it. Please put this savagery on hold till the arrival of the grand festival!'

Once the mist dissipated, the figure of the Grey One once again became visible. He gently hopped onto a tree branch from the gigantic tree.

"Is it possible that this guy can't be killed.....?"

Godou was in an incomparable state of shock as he saw how easily the tree was revived.

Up until now he had many encounters with immortal deities. The goddess Athena was among those who possessed this trait.

Is it possible that the underlings of the undying god of earth, Saturnus, are also immortal? Contemplating over this topic, Godou immediately sought out his female counterparts.

"Those who possess the chain process of dying and then being revived are related to the deities associated with the snake goddess ."

"Let's first not concern ourselves with whether or not the divine beast and other such existences of a heretic god can really display this reincarnating ability. There must be another explanation for this successful resurrection."

"There's no way to clearly see due to the mist masking it..... However, I can sense that his power is being drawn from the Crown of Saturnalia. I'm afraid the mystery to this resurrection lies within there."

Erica and Liliana immediately stated their perspective deductions while Yuri replied in a quiet tone.

"Godou, for the time being let me deal with the divine tree."

After hearing the hime-miko express her thoughts just now, Erica proclaimed as such.

The Cuore di Leone suddenly appeared in her hand.

"Please go with Yuri and Liliana and allow me to be the opponent for this strange person. If we could figure out the mystery between him and that divine artifact, we won't have to wait till heretic Saturnus's revival to solve this."

Godou did not object. Yuri and Liliana also nodded.

On the other hand, after careful deliberation, the Grey One said:

"Oh.....Kusanagi Godou, it appears you have plenty of intelligent members around you. If I don't destroy this, then I most likely won't be able to buy enough time.....'

"Eh?"

Godou could not help but ask in response towards this troubling statement. What did he want to destroy?

However, the other person didn't respond. Facing him, the Grey One whistled at him. Following that, the divine tree started to shake its branches and leaves.

Rustle.....Rustle.....Rustle.....Rustle.....

Like playing an instrument, an indescribable sound came out of the divine tree's tree branch.

'The festival of the fruit deranged the citizens, causing intoxication. Providing consolation. Bringing celebration. Slaves will have their moment of glory. Kings will abandon their thrones for shackles. This dream is the one bestowed by the god who heralds the spring.....'

Furthermore, the Grey One started to sing along to the melody of the divine tree.

The tones and lyrics effectively became an ensemble that carried a strong incantation which could be felt all over the place.

——Immediately after that, Godou saw a bizarre scene.

He was currently walking along the city streets. Speaking of which, they were quite outdated. He was located in an unknown city. The era he resided in was also a mystery. In short, Kusanagi Godou walked on unsteadily.

The people around him were all merrily partying. They sang, they danced, and drank alcohol throughout the night.

Godou, who was amongst the crowd, kept his gaze down and silently walked on.

Wrapped around his hands were handcuffs and shackles. Wrapped around his feet were chained leg weights and fetters.

Moreover, both of his arms had been branded by a branding iron. The imprint demonstrated his new status. Yup, Kusanagi Godou was not a king anymore, heck he was not even a free person. He was a slave――.

"That, what was that just now! ?"

Godou suddenly raised his head in astonishment. That incantation was probably the combined efforts between the divine tree and the Grey One. However, it still wasn't able to break through a Campione's magic resistance. Looks like he does not have the power of a heretic god.

That was why Godou only saw those strange images, he was not actually harmed.

His body suddenly tensed as he was forcibly tossed away.

"Guah!?"

Godou was basically hurtled to the ground like an evildoer being punished. Following that, his body was pressed and held down.

He looked towards the attacker——to his surprise, it was Liliana.

She stared at Godou with a hollow gaze. Erica also had an identical eye expression as she closed in on Godou. No, even Yuri who was behind her was the same.

'During this time before Saturnus is revived from the sprout, there's no way I can successfully accomplish my task due to my power restriction. Since it is like this, you.....a male godslayer, should downgrade to a slave.'

The voice of the Grey One came from somewhere.

'However, during this period of time I'll disrupt your status, rendering you from using your original authorities. By doing this I'll be able to buy some time, Kusanagi Godou.'

The faces of Erica, Yuri, and Liliana all closed in on him.

Unable to freely move, Kusanagi Godou was powerless in preventing the girls from seizing his lips.

'It goes without saying that you are a godslayer. Should you have the heart to do battle, then it should be child's play for you to

break my curse with your tempestuous fighting spirit. Should our paths cross in the near future, I shall flee. At the same time I shall also uproot the new sprout should you encounter it. Our ill-fated encounter shall be set aside for now!'

Through the lips of the girls, the mysterious curse was transferred inside through oral intake.

Immediately afterwards, Kusanagi Godou lost the bonds of camaraderie he had built up with his comrades over the course of almost a year. Even the task instructed by his sworn elder sister was forgotten. The ambiguous position he was caught in prompted the predicament he was in before winter break——.

Part 5

After reflecting back on what just happened, he understood that the altercation between him and his opponent lasted for quite a long time.

Within the business office of the Hong Kong based Lu family in Kabukichou, Godou emotionally counted the number of days. The first time he encountered the Grey One was on December 11th. Going out to eat with Shizuka and Asuka took place on December 15th.

Furthermore, today was December 21st, the final day of the second semester. Unexpectedly, he had already covered a ten day period.

"Plus with that email, the resurrection or whatever it was talking about, that was actually in regards to Saturnus....."

Then did Lu Yinghua actually send the report? I must check just to be sure.

That said, this year's winter solstice was set to take place on December 22nd. There was no time to waste——. The anxious Godou appeared to be inside a reception room. He went towards what was probably a sofa meant for receiving guests and sat down .

In front of him on the glass table was the cordless handset of a fixed-line phone. He had already waited around an hour for a call from Lu Yinghua. Looking at the time, twenty-two hours had already passed.

"I-I'm very sorry. I should've used Mailing magic to send the letter to young master at the sacred mountain. We can only helplessly wait for them to reply."

Opening the door, the male host apologized. He bowed his head while in constant panic, probably because he feared that Kusanagi Godou was the same type of person as Luo Hao.

"For now I'll wait another ten minutes and see. After that, if there is no news, then I should probably get going. I apologize for the inconvenience I have caused you."

Although he wanted to try his best to collect more information, there just wasn't much time left.

After leaving the place, Godou planned on heading towards the Crown of Saturnalia's original whereabouts. There was only a few hours left till the day of the winter solstice. It would be best to take action as soon as possible.

"——!? I-I won't be able to help you, my utmost apologies! For atonement, in our faction we would be branded, but in Japan you actually have to cut off a finger right!?"

"The idea of doing either of them never even crossed my mind!"

Godou wanted to help up the host who was holding his knees while kneeling in a kowtow position.

Just when he was about to do that, a lively melody was emitted from the phone due to an incoming call. As a result, the host revealed a joyous expression. Godou appeared to have wanted to take the phone away from him as he picked it up.

"Is this Yinghua!?"

'Oh, the voice of Esteemed Uncle. You being safe is all that matters.....'

Lu Yinghua's voice rarely sounded so languish across the phone .

'No, I never would've thought that I had already been with my master for over ten days. I was stuck with a pile of chores and practice over here. Although I wanted to go back, there was no way I could have. Just now I had to go through a lot of trouble to deceive master and run towards a village with a phone.....'

"Compared to this Yinghua, the email that mentioned something being revived on the day of the winter solstice, were you the sender?"

Godou interrupted the virtuous nephew.

'Yeah, about that situation, from the fragments master recalled, I was able to pry out some trouble. That's why I sent out a high urgency report.'

So it was like that. Godou understood. Be that as it may, from the anxious tone of that email, there was the fear that he had to comply with his master's commands, hence leading to an urgency of time. Since Godou repeatedly warned him to use the least rule breaking method, he probably adopted this form of intelligence gathering.

"The one being revived was actually referring to the deity Saturnus?"

'Yes. It is said that in ancient Rome between the dates December 17th and December 24th, a grand festival for Saturnus would take

place during that week. During this festival, the people would endlessly feast in joy and carouse. Of course, the calendar was different back then.'

Godou did not understand Lu Yinghua's explanation.

"Well, how can you be so sure that Saturnus will be revived during the time of the winter solstice?"

'From what master said, no matter what calendar you use, it will definitely be on the day of the winter solstice. I've completely forgotten the reason why and it seems master will not say anymore on the matter.'

After Lu Yinghua used a careless tone to explain, he asked:

'However, why does Esteemed Uncle care about this matter? If it was Esteemed Uncle getting involved, then the sealing of the bizarre divine artifact would've taken place a long time ago. With that, the problem should be over with right? I believed this is definitely the case so I only informed you on what would occur on that day.'

That was typical of Lu Yinghua. He understood Godou's preferred method of battle very clearly.

Although he was cautious during the prelude to battle, once the battle commenced he had the advantage of immediately engaging in a blitzkrieg attack. Correct, if it was the habitual Godou, he would have faced off against the Crown of Saturnalia ages ago.

"No, this situation has become a bit more complicated....."

Godou briefly mentioned the matter regarding the Grey One's curse. After hearing about it, Lu Yinghua reflected on it for a bit and then unhurriedly began to speak.

'The ancient festival of Saturnus appeared to be an uncanny game. Switching identities.....slaves and their masters would swap positions and such.'

"Switching....."

'Yes, the slaves would issue out commands and the master would have to comply during this shambled state of merriment for seven days and seven nights.'

Slaves becoming masters, masters becoming slaves.

"T-The curse this grey bastard casted on me is——"

'My belief is that it was the one I mentioned. Isn't its purpose just to recreate the power from that game for Esteemed Uncle and the onee-sans? Furthermore, the curse will also restrict the companions at your side. It just seems like he is toying with Esteemed Uncle's memories regarding his own status.'

"I knew something about that curse was strange. I never would've thought there existed that sort of backstory....."

'Actually, I heard that 150 years ago a terrifying, chaotic event occurred at the grounds which Saturnus made his descent. The people living in the city where he resided completely forgot about

all the various boundaries in their life and went partying merrily. Families were not in the least concerned, work and obligations were ignored, morals and a sense of shame were all forgotten, the heart and soul were preoccupied with merriment, frenzy, drinking and chanting, forever on a singing and dancing binge.'

"Forever!?"

'Indeed. If it was edible then it was all gobbled up. Even muddy water and horse manure would suffice. Assuming the body was exhausted to the point where you couldn't even move, there would be spastic movements as you continued to dance to the last breath.'

This was probably a scene in which his sworn elder sister Luo Cuilian had witnessed before.

Imagining that scene that could only be described as a disturbing feast of madness, Godou was left breathless.

'If you do not vanquish Saturnus, everyone's behavior will stay like that till their death——this was what master told me.'

"Since he is the festival god of bountiful harvests, I thought he wouldn't undertake something as heinous as this....."

'The curse Esteemed Uncle and the others were ensnared in seems to be a weakened version.'

As expected of a heretic god. Godou felt immediate actions were necessary.

Regardless of what the original deity's traits were, he triggered a disaster, meaning the trait of provoking disasters was certainly fulfilled. It was necessary to urgently check the situation with the emblem.

If only heretic Saturnus were to initiate some sort of peaceful conduct.

However, if things do not turn out like that then——

'Goodluck on your battle, Esteemed Uncle.'

Lu Yinghua spoke as if he could read Godou's mind.

'This is all I can do from Lushan. No, if I were to go over there and get inflicted by Saturnus's curse, then I probably won't end up as your comrade anymore. However, perhaps there is a way.'

"Hey hey. I'm definitely not as aggressive as Nee-san ok?"

'What the heck are you saying? You are the devil king-sama who defeated a god. For Esteemed Uncle's group, this isn't about a difference between strong or weak, instead it is about winning or losing isn't it!?'

Lu Yinghua cheerfully smiled at Godou's complaints.

'Plus if the enemy is crazed enough, Esteemed Uncle will also have the freedom to be as violent as he wants. Well, it will probably be an even match!'

Perhaps the one who was more knowledgeable about Campiones was this disciple of a devil king. Godou scratched his head in contemplation and then made up his mind.

Even though this time he didn't have anyone to fight alongside him, up until this day he always had assistance in all aspects of life . Only in this case was he unable to rely on the girls. However, even with that, if he didn't do anything——.

Godou unknowingly began to smile. The corners of his mouth took on a sinister form.

If you ask why, it is probably because the power restriction was negated. Thus, he could go at it with his full strength. He could finally rid himself of this issue imposed by the enemy which inexplicably caused him aggravation.

Needless to say, this was definitely not the resentment a pacifist should have.

Chapter 6 - Saturnus Revived

Part 1

Once he left the business office in Kabukicho, Godou got on a car and embarked towards the Kasai district.

He requested the Lu family for their assistance. Well, since they seemed to have determined that he was a being similar to the cult leader, just one glance at him would give them an understanding of his intentions.

However, this occurred after he, whom people would regard as someone they should distance themselves from as much as possible, lowered his head and carefully made his request. Despite doing so, the other party was still in a constant state of panic.

In short, after ten minutes had passed, a company van, belonging to Hong Kong's Lu family, drove along the shoreline on the coastal route to send Godou to his destination. However, the actual destination was in Tokyo Bay.

Godou intended to draw support from the power of the History Compilation Committee after arriving at Kasai.

"Wow! What is that!?"

Sitting in the driver's seat, the host exclaimed as such.

His line of sight was directed towards the ocean. He was distracted while driving, but there was a reasonable explanation for this. Tokyo Bay was radiating with splendor this evening.

There were several hundreds, no, several thousands of these tiny little light blue flames――.

The constantly swaying flames floated in the sky overlooking Tokyo Bay.

Although the Tokyo Bay route was a selling point during the night, they wouldn't install those kinds of lighting.

"They are simply wisps of fire, or it's probably fishing boat lights....."

Godou muttered from within the van as he gazed towards the sea.

He was still unable to sense a deity's aura. The deity's power was also undetected during the battle. However, he firmly held onto his belief.

He feared that the Grey One and the divine sprout were nearby the coast.

Glancing at the clock within the car, right now it was December 21st, 22:20.

It was hard to imagine what these deity related beings were planning to carry out during the early hours of the next day.

However, the idea that there was no room for hesitation was probably undeniable.

"May I get off here? I'll head in by myself."

Godou made this request to the host sitting on the driver's side.

Godou rushed through Kasai Rinkai Park to reach his objective, the countless wisps of fire and the sea.

Even though the situation turned out this way, a location that was not only large but devoid of people at this late hour was optimal. He didn't have to worry about causing havoc——well, maybe not.

"Looks like it will turn out just like before....."

Godou muttered as if he was scolding himself.

Even so, Godou was aware that his own state of mind wasn't stable. He had always felt that he understood the reason why. Ever since he became a Campione, he continuously battled against different opponents alongside other people.

However, tonight was the first time Godou was going to battle solo.

Well——. No matter what battle he faced, the person to rely on should be himself. He also believed that his companions were dependable. However, a person who couldn't battle single-handedly would be unable to achieve victory in very dangerous situations.

For this reason he didn't mind battling independently.

None of his usual friends were present today. He won't deny that because of this, he has this empty feeling inside. Furthermore, he also couldn't deny that he had this impatient mood towards the culprit who caused this situation.....

Godou did some fruitless soul searching as he rushed towards the wisps of flames.

Godou disregarded what was considered Japan's largest Ferris wheel and ran past the jogging trail into a vast field. This wasn't even his maximum running speed as he chose to move at a slow jogging pace.

Afterwards, just when the man-made shoreline that was illuminated by the countless flame wisps came into view.....

'Seems you've finally woken young godslayer, Kusanagi Godou !'

A human figure was currently heading towards him from the sea.

It was the Grey One, who was either the willpower of the divine artifact, Crown of Saturnalia, or a guardian spirit.

"You aren't going to stay silent or commit suicide again are you ?"

Hearing the Grey One speak, Godou replied in a quiet tone.

That was comparing it to what he imagined to be a tone filled with anger.

‘Under these conditions with you, who is now filled with a godslayer's will to battle, it will probably be impossible to buy any more time. However, there’s still a few hours till the winter solstice .....you shall see later since no matter what I will hold out till then.'

The voice that leaked out of the grey sailcloth was brimming with the willpower of a challenger.

'I have prepared for people of the earth, a revival mechanism that will enable the god of bountiful harvests to awaken. For the power necessary to accomplish this awakening, I shall put forth my remaining divinity.'

Following that, the Grey One's body began emitting a strong incantation.

If we were to compare this to Godou or a heretic god, of course it would be considered very weak. However, it did surpass the strength of divine beasts.

'This holy date——with the date of the winter solstice approaching, my divine power also surges. Furthermore, it is combined with this city's population's spirit energy and life force!'

Hovering over Tokyo Bay were the numerous light blue colored flame wisps. These flames suddenly started to move, increased in speed, and rapidly descended. Following that, the flames collide into the Grey One's back and were absorbed.

The devil-like light illuminating the Kasai coast vanished without a trace. Facing towards him, the Grey One's magic power strengthened.

For a Campione such as Godou, the difference between their power was still very distant.

However, in comparison to just a moment ago, the Grey One approximately doubled his strength.

'I always have to assemble some sort of boring disturbance in a city. Now I'm in a predicament since you were tangled up in it..... Well, there could be some value to this.'

Does he mean the greyification of the Santa Clauses? Thinking about this matter made Godou frown.

"Oh that? You divine beings seem to all inadvertently cause paranormal activities. You unwittingly let the world descend into chaos. What a mess!"

'Your followers probably mentioned this before. In the past I served under a deity.'

The Grey One appeared to be exultant as he laughed aloud. Speaking of which, Yuri originally perceived him as a divine spirit. Perhaps due to the loss of flesh, this was tragic fate of this deity's soul.

'If you mean a strange phenomenon on that scale, it could be evoked once again——No, it has already begun. Bear witness to the greatest miracle this lackluster god will bring about!'

Immediately afterwards, the bird shape emblem suddenly appeared in the skies overlooking the Grey One's position.

That of course was the Crown of Saturnalia. The emblem continued its ascension.

"After being on the sea, it went airborne!"

Godou exclaimed while looking up at the emblem which suddenly ascended rapidly.

What appeared to be an enormous parasitic tree emerged from the fields of the park. The incarnation of the 1000 year old divine tree grew at the same rapid pace as it did in the past.

The tree was still as large and stately as it was before.

"This guy will turn into a heretic god!?"

'Correct. Once the night is over, the grand festival will unfold. When the time arrives, my new sprout will be ready and ultimately grow into the real Saturnus! Pay attention carefully!'

Godou could sense it. The magical power residing within the divine tree was gradually increasing!

Once the divine tree's magic power reaches its peak it will probably become a heretic god. Looks like peaceful consulting was out of the question.

Usually Godou, who was in a bad mood, would call out the Boar to attack.

However, he already tried this maneuver before. If he does that the divine tree will probably just respawn again. What should I do ? Which incarnation would be the right choice?

As Godou was contemplating this over, countless flower buds appeared on the divine tree's branches.

They emerged from the innumerable amounts of leaves on the thousand year old tree. On the branches, this myriad of flower buds began to germinate. In addition, these flower buds all bloomed into white flowers.

Not only that, but within a short amount of time, these flowers all wilted and produced a black fruit.

Just like that a slew of black colored fruits emerged on the branches of the divine tree.

Moreover, the shape of these fruits were abnormally frightening . They had approximately a one meter diameter spherical body and in the middle was a slit, sort of like the mouth of an animal.

Rustle.....Rustle.....Rustle.....

Rustle.....Rustle.....Rustle.....

The evening breeze shook the divine tree's branches, making its leaves rub against each other. An atypical, ear piercing sound was produced by the astonishingly large divine tree .

The fruits were ferociously barking like a wild beast, probably proclaiming its battle spirit towards Kusanagi Godou.

——His Campione instincts warned him that these fruits were probably very dangerous objects. But how should he defend? Were there any incarnations of Verethragna that could counter this kind of object!?

Just when he naturally shook his head.....

"Do not worry Your Majesty. Even though it looks dire, Ena will find a way!"

Godou suddenly heard a familiar and lively voice. He looked back to see the Hime-Miko of the Sword closing in on him wearing her usual uniform——that person was Seishuuin Ena.

Part 2

"You’re here Seishuuin!?"

"Yup, I requested them to hurriedly send Ena from Chichibu to Tokyo."

Contrary to her title, the boldly smiling Ena didn't bring her sword today.

"Ena thought as long as she went directly to the location in Tokyo where the strange phenomenon was happening, she would definitely be able to meet Your Majesty. Hehe, Ena was very enthusiastic to come and assist Your Majesty!"

"What do you mean very enthusiastic? The other girls are like, so you also....."

He probably understood and omitted the rest of the line when he spoke. Godou was bewildered as he gazed at Ena.

This time his adversary was capable of interfering with his interpersonal relationships. Truthfully speaking, he would really appreciate it if she could help.

However, if the opponent decides to utilize that previously used curse, then even Ena would become aberrant.

The Hime-Miko of the Sword should have understood that though. However, why is she here? Godou's gaze carried a sense of suspicion. Ena, being just as bright and cheerful as before, nodded heavily.

——Now I get it! Just when Godou suddenly realized Ena's intentions.

'Another follower? Kusanagi Godou, your party contains many talented members. Since it is like this, I, wielder of the artifact of Saturnus, shall entertain you all.'

The Grey One began chanting and a rustling noise was heard as the divine tree shook its branches and leaves.

'The festival of the fruit deranged the citizens, making them intoxicated. Consoling them. Bringing celebration. Slaves will have their moment of glory. Kings will abandon their thrones for shackles. This dream is the one bestowed by the god who heralds the spring.....'

He heard the same spell words for the curse used eight days ago at Tokyo Bay.

However, Godou wasn't worried. Even Ena had a calm and collected expression.

The Grey One chanted along to the divine tree's accompaniment . The violent wizardry currently being unleashed by the two was nothing be afraid of.

“By the blessing of bows and arrows, bestow honor upon this great sword!"

Upon hearing the Hime-Miko of the Sword chanting her spell words, Godou released the power within his right arm.

Performing the opposite, Ena extended her right arm and used her hand to search for the divine aura of steel. To her, this

existence's aura was like her partner. Godou nodded, entrusting the hime-miko with the sword.

Ena used her hand to pull the colorless and formless divine aura towards her and tightly grasped it.

"Beseeching the grace of Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi! May its shadow manifest hither!"

Upon completing the spell words, Ena fetched her partner.

Her partner, the Sword of Susanoo, was retrieved from the scabbard that was Godou's right arm.

'Oh!? This lady can actually use the divine sword!'

Seeing Ena summon forth the Sword of Susanoo, the Grey One responded in astonishment.

The majestic sword had a blade length of three-foot-three-and-a-half-inch. The blade possessed a pitch black color and a slight curvature. Furthermore, the pitch black divine sword was embedded with the ability to disrupt magic!

What was severed was of course the curse released by the Grey One!

The Hime-Miko of the Sword was the only human being privileged with the ability to wield the sword of Susanoo. This was the reason why Ena wasn't afraid of the curse.

"Seishuuin, the opposition is now on the move!"

On the other side, Godou had already transferred his attention from the curse to the divine tree. He didn't see a spectacle like last time. Perhaps it was because his fighting spirit had been ignited. Godou's magical power had greatly increased. Under this state as a Campione, he understood that the curse was already nullified of power.

Since it turned out like this, in his eyes the greatest threat was the rapidly grown divine tree over there.

Rustle……..Rustle……..Rustle……..

Rustle……..Rustle…..…Rustle…..…

Godou and Ena were both looking up at the majestic divine tree .

The multitudinous branches swayed, the leaves shook, the colossal tree trunk trembled, creating an indescribable tone in the park along the seaside.

In a flash, several thousand black colored fruits instantly cultivated on the colossal thousand-year-old tree.

These fruits suddenly plummeted down from the tree branches. All of the fruits dispersed into the air. Like being permeated by a black mist, the skies overlooking the park was completely enshrouded.

An innumerable amount of fruits hovered in the air, becoming a canopy above the current location. The winter constellations were no longer visible.

Afterwards, a portion of the fruits plopped down.

After violently striking the surface, the fruits exploded. The dirt, asphalt, vegetation, parterre, and fence enclosures in that area were all caught in the explosion. Everywhere throughout the Kasai Rinkai Park was being bombed in rapid succession.

Seeing as the fruit exploded near their vicinity, Godou said with a dejected voice:

“If this continues we will get blown up too!”

“I said not to worry. Let me take care of it Your Majesty!”

Undaunted from the start of the ongoing explosions, Ena caressed the sword of Susanoo with her left hand and then started chanting.

"This was where Susanoo no Mikoto started his uprising, leading a thousand savage gods!"

Godou had previously used these spell words when handling the Ama no Murakumo.

The hime-miko's body was flushed with the divine blade's aura. Incurring the holy spirit of a god, this was the trump card known as divine possession which had the power to match that of divine beasts and demigods.

"A thousand swords standing upon the earth, used as city walls to defend against the enemies."

Ena, being under divine possession, grasped the divine sword Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. Its pitch black blade and hilt, which was modeled after Japanese swords, were instantly smashed into pieces and dispersed.

It was indeed shattered, having turned into shards. Furthermore, the numerous shards of the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi hovered around Ena and formed something similar to a fortress around her.

"The sword of a thousand was defeated and became a diminutive serpent. However, Mikoto obtained a sword from the great serpent's tail. Namely, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, which became the steel that defeats a thousand blades!"

Legend has it that back in the olden days, Susanoo tied down the blades of a thousand swords as a substitute for a fortress.

In the end when he had lost every single blade, he received the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, a divine sword which surpassed

the one thousand sharp fragmented blades. Ena currently planned on using these spell words for the great undertaking of presenting its one thousand blade fragments!

"By the prestige of the divine sword, rush forth to deal a single strike!"

In a split second, the one thousand fragments created by the divine blade dispersed and flew towards the black fruits that covered the skies like a permeating mist. Furthermore, a continuous attack began towards the annoying exploding fruits. The fragments pierced through, penetrating the fruit and setting it off to explode.

After she recovered, the sky was already blossoming with the countless fireworks display and rumbling sound from the explosions.

Following that, the black covering over the sky dissipated.

The valorous divine blade emerged after the fragments returned to Ena's hand. The Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi once again appeared.

Rustle Rustle! Rustle Rustle! Rustle Rustle! Rustle Rustle! Rustle Rustle!

The divine tree produced an even more intense noise compared to what they have heard up until now. Perhaps it was displaying its animosity.

In addition, even the Grey One yelled out.

'A divine artifact that embodies the logic of heretic steel!? This be a terrifying display of the works of the gods!'

"What a weird irritating guy."

Ena nonchalantly muttered and rushed towards the Grey One.

The divine sword, having just returned to normal, had no problem piercing through its target. The Grey One didn't even try to dodge as the sword ran right through him. His body crumbled just like before.

However, a sound came from above.

'Ha ha ha. Divine sword wielding girl, it's insignificant even if you destroy my body. As long as this Crown still exists, the sprout of Saturnus and I shall continuously regenerate!"

This voice came from the emblem floating above the divine tree. The familiar bird design was the Crown of Saturnalia that was supposed to be rooted to the surface of Tokyo Bay.

"Sure enough, the problem lies over there….."

"Then Ena will head over and destroy the tree. If that strange guy comes to hinder me, will Your Majesty take care of it?"

Godou of course felt this was the correct assumption as he nodded. Ena carried the divine blade and sped off.

She rushed as if she was flying towards the root of the divine tree. As a result, a green vine protruded from the ground to obstruct her.

Simply put, the vine was like a large serpent as it assumed an ancistroid form with its neck, turning itself into a whip-like shape.

The front portion of that vine attempted to lash out at Ena's lively body. The Hime-Miko of the Sword, with the movements of a monkey, easily dodged the strike and closed in on the root of the divine tree.

Immediately after, a second vine emerged from the ground to once again impede Ena's path.

Not only that, a third and fourth vine also appeared. In the end, about ten vines, akin to a nest of snakes, continuously lunged towards Ena.

"It feels like the Yamata no Orochi!"

Not to be outdone, Ena swung her sword after she appeared to recall the tale of Susanoo and Yamata no Orochi[24].

A purple liquid spurted out from the severed vine.

Furthermore, Ena gracefully leap from place to place with her body movement resembling Minamoto no Yoshitsune[25] as she dodged the onslaught of whip-like attacks. For the moment the odds of winning this battle seemed quite high.

However, the enemy had powers that equally matched that of a divine beast. It was probably time to unleash the Bull to provide cover.

Just as Godou contemplated over this, a chant was heard.

"Hear the sorrow of David, people! Alas, may the heroes fall! Alas, may the weapons of war be destroyed!"

“Eh!?”

These solemn sounding spell swords, this was without a doubt the secret technique that was her trump card.

"Undrinking blood of murderers, the unretreating bow of Jonathan! Unconsuming flesh of the brave soul, returning the sword of Saul in vain!”

Godou looked at the direction where the voice came from. As expected, it was her.

She stood there with her right hand carrying the silver longbow and her left hand lifting the arrows of blue light. Her silver ponytail swayed, draped over her shoulders was a blue and black shawl. She was indeed set in battle attire.

"O' bow of Jonathan, with eagle's swiftness and lion's strength, a hero's weapon. Achieve soaring victory!"

Afterwards, an arrow of blue light was finally released. Liliana Kranjcar fired a destructive weapon that could even injure and kill a god.

The released arrow of blue light split into six individual arrows midway through, all of which were directed towards the divine tree's thick trunk.

This was probably because the dozens of enormous vines that were being manipulated focused their attention towards Ena.

Attacked by the spell words of David, which can even kill a god if the being's fatal spot was hit, the tree withered away with astonishing speed.

Right away, the divine tree lost all its moisture and water content at once, becoming all dried up.

Afterwards, the colossal tree that had been producing those sounds began to collapse. The crumbled pieces of the tree then broke up even further and were scattered by the ocean breeze.

On the other hand, at the same time when the divine tree began to collapse, Godou expressed utter shock to Liliana's battle engagement.

"Why are you here!?"

"It would've been strange if I didn't show up. Beginning with our unresolved case, it led to this kind of situation development."

Liliana's voice carried a tone of dissatisfaction.

"Actually I want to ask, why can't I be here?"

"T-That, well you see, that grey bastard had caused a ton of disturbances."

This aspect was very hard to elaborate on which put Godou in a dilemma.

Because she was inflicted by that curse from before, Liliana's memory become quite hazy. Due to its effect, a subtle difference arose in Godou and Liliana's relationship. The matter regarding everyone's first encounter with the Crown was forgotten.

If the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi was utilized, it could rescind the memory derangement.

However, for the Grey One, who was hovering in the sky, as long as the Crown of Saturnalia was still intact, the memory disruption could happen as many times as he wanted which would result in a perpetual cycle.

Uncertain as to why Godou was hesitant, Liliana took a step further and angrily corrected him.

"Kusanagi Godou, all you had to do was this. Say 'please accompany me in battle', and trust me. Perhaps this is an enemy that is somewhat hard to deal with, however I am your number one knight. Being there to assist Kusanagi Godou anytime, anywhere, is one of the duties I have assumed."

"Eh——?"

What Liliana just said felt like her usual catchphrase.

During that brief moment of surprise, once again a voice descended from the skies.

'Hmm. You have apparently gathered your followers to your side once more. In that case, it would be most amusing to render your arduous efforts naught――'

The Grey One's tone sounded as if he was quite interested. This bastard is in high spirits once again!?

Godou was aware that a sense of anger was emerging from within him. At his side, Liliana's face was full of suspicion as she surveyed the Crown of Saturnalia that was floating in the sky. Moreover, Ena was racing back to them while single-handedly holding the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi.

Should he request Ena to combat that curse with the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi――?

In the split second Godou was contemplating over this,

'Do not worry, Godou-san. That kind of power will no longer have any effect on us.'

He heard a whispering sound by his ear.

It was actually the voice of a girl that he didn't anticipate to be here. Cautious like an austere follower of commandments and possessing a tender voice, this was without a doubt a voice relayed through psychic sensing.

"――Mariya!?"

The recently sent message was transferred by the hime-miko. That said, it was to be expected.

As Liliana's line of sight crossed his, the silver-haired girl only said 'no problem' towards this and heavily nodded, remaining perfectly composed. Ena perhaps picked up on the situation. Her grin seemed to express 'hey, that's amazing'.

Immediately afterwards, a surge of wizardry descended from the sky.

'Slaves will have their moment of glory. Kings will abandon their thrones for shackles. This is the one dream bestowed by the god who heralds the spring.....'

The spell words to dethrone a king surrounded Godou, Liliana, and Ena.

However, there was also the chanting sound for the counterattack.

"For the sake of maintaining order in Rome, the Senate decreed the suspension of imperium. Steel of the lion, take this as your foundation!"

Godou had definitely heard these spell words before.

This became known as the secret technique of the Diavolo Rosso , which was utilized when a sturdy garrison was required to be built.

"Senatus consultum ultimum, hereby decreed!"

Instilled with protection magic, a steel chain-like object was flying around in the sky like a living being.

The sword, Cuore di Leone, transformed into chains——these chains were fixated on the heads of Godou and the girls, depicting the same pentagrams used by King Solomon[26]. These were supposed to be the seals that guarded the body from fiendish magic and demons.

"Evil be purified, Disaster be dismissed, Misfortune be exorcised, efficacious signs of the bearer of Fortune, I implore your manifestation!"

This voice came from an even younger girl compared to the ones that usually accompany Godou.

Only she could have used the disaster purification spirit arts on the lock of the Cuore di Leone which defended against the curse descending from the sky.

'Oh——!?'

"Well, it's pretty much like this. Despite having powers of divine origins, the will of the divine artifact possesses a restricted spiritual power."

The commander of the lion of steel had triumphed with a magnificent victory as she approached them.

"Hikari's disaster purification is able to eliminate a small portion of a god's power. I firmly believe that it is now completely defendable."

Her name was of course Erica Blandelli.

A red and black overcoat draped over her body. Her battle stance was already primed.

The miko sisters were also by her side. Yuri and her little sister Hikari, a hime-miko learning on the job, were reservedly smiling.

"If that really wasn't just to make our relationship with Godou drift apart, but rather a curse making us loath Godou, then the situation right now would've turned out much differently. They wouldn't even qualify as a devil king Campione's adversary if that was the case. Oh, and Lily."

Playing the leading role by an appearance at the very end, it seemed to be an act in which Erica excelled at.

She amply displayed her own capabilities while speaking towards her old friend and rival.

"I, Erica Blandelli, am the one who holds the title and position of Kusanagi Godou's number one knight. No matter what, I'll never surrender that position to you!"

The girls of red and blue were disputing over who would be the number one knight.

This type of conversation had already been a common occurrence. The two of them conversed just as they did in the past.

Part 3

"When in the world did you guys break free from the curse?"

"It happened during the evening today after parting ways with Godou."

Erica indifferently answered Godou's primary suspicion.

"The biggest mistake that strange divine spirit or divine artifact's willpower committed is using that completely flawed memory manipulation to strive for more than ten days worth of time."

After a brief glance at the Crown floating in the sky, Erica spoke in a provocative manner.

"Regardless of how urgent a situation is for one or two days, once its duration is dragged out, many irrational doubts will arise. When I conversed with Godou today I also felt something was amiss. Hence, I was skeptical on whether or not I was struck by some kind of psychic attack so I decided to seek out Hikari."

"I was startled when I suddenly received Erica-neesama's call."

Hikari energetically smiled as Godou nodded towards this revelation.

"After trying to eliminate any spells on my body, my memory suddenly returned to normal. Later, me and Hikari went to find Yuri and Lily together."

"H-How cruel, you should have immediately given me a call!"

Godou said what seemed to be a retort to Erica's shocking announcement.

Consequently, a devilish smile was revealed by this girl who exhibits her talent in a dazzling manner like a painting.

"Since you seemed to be very busy, I thought it would be okay to excuse you. Plus, to a Campione like Godou, you should've been able to remove the curse through your own power right?"

It was the patented demonic smile of Erica that he had sorely missed.

To see this type of smile once again made him feel very happy, however there was always something that kept him ill at ease. But, well――.

"No matter how you look at it, being able to meet up with everyone once again should count as good news."

The disjointed gears were finally able to be smoothly combined together.

Having grasped the mood of the situation, Godou nodded towards the assembled group of people.

Erica and her haughtiness, Yuri and her sincerity, Liliana and her seriousness, Ena and her proud smile, and there was Hikari with her youth and liveliness. Everyone had their own perspective expression and nodded back at Godou.

However, a voice descended from the skies to throw cold water on the group――.

'N-No! Young lady, don't say I committed a gaffe. In my opinion, the outcome this time is satisfactory. Despite encountering some trivial problems, being fortunate enough to be

able to disrupt the relationship between you guys allowed me to achieve this——the arrival of the day of the grand festival!'

"The sky! Everyone please look up at the sky!"

Yuri suddenly shouted and directed her finger towards the Crown of Saturnalia hovering in the sky.

"A coffin……the coffin has been opened……"

She probably received a spirit vision as she spoke with a quiet, trembling tone.

Immediately after, the Crown of Saturnalia floating in the sky broke into pieces and scattered below. The broken pieces splashed into the ocean upon impact. In contrast to the emblem that had been at this location until now, a radiant golden oval appeared in its place.

To Godou and the others on the ground, it appeared to be as large as the moon.

A meteor descended towards Kasai Rinkai Park from the oval. Right when the violent impact occurred, a gigantic divine tree germinated from the crash site.——No wait.

The existence that emanated this time had a peculiar form compared to the divine trees up until now.

Its body length was approximately thirty meters. Candidly speaking, it appeared to be a wooden figure created by a clumsy child through mimicry.

The widest area resembled a torso. The human-like form was barely recognizable.

Both of its legs were thick and short. Its arms on the other hand were slender, with a length that reached the ground. The head was tiny and solitarily placed above the carcass. Not only that, but there were shoots, branches, and leaves germinating all over the body.

The greenish-blue shoots and foliage decorated the brown tree in specks. This combination formed an indescribable color arrangement.

"Be careful everyone. That guy is much stronger than before!"

Ena had a worrisome expression as she warned the others.

The user of divine possession probably sensed that the existence 's power can be compared to that of a god. Godou felt it as well. He still wasn't a heretic god. He didn't feel that boiling sensation when encountering a god.

There is the fear that this divine tree represents a middle-ground existence that is between a god and non-god. Perhaps it could be considered as an ent demigod——.

'Soon the sunrise of the grand festival will arrive…...I only serve as a priest to last until this very day…...now it seems that the

moment has arrived. My remaining mission is to incur the seed of Saturnus and send it to the ground…...should be…...time…... silencing..….now…...'

The voice coming from the sky finally dissipated.

Acting decisively towards this was Erica. She turned to her old friend and rival and sent her a signal with her eyes.

"Lily, it would be quite meaningless to hold anything back at this point. Let's charge with everything we have ok? Ena-san are you fine with this?"

Afterwards, she grasped the Cuore di Leone and sped off.

Liliana and Ena both nodded and followed. The target for the three of them was the gigantic ent demigod!

"And seven priests bearing seven trumpets of rams' horns before the ark of the Lord went on continually, and blew with the trumpets: and the armed men went before them!"

"And they warred against the Midianites, as the Lord commanded Moses!"

Erica and Liliana both chanted as they rushed in.

These were the divine annihilation privileges bestowed upon them as they implemented their smiting spell words.

"Joshua said unto the people, Shout; for the Lord hath given you the city. And they utterly destroyed all that was in the city, both

man and woman, young and old, and ox, and sheep, and ass, with the edge of the sword!"

A scarlet ray of light wrapped around Erica's body. The slender blade, Cuore di Leone, also deformed into a barbed lance.

"And they slew all the males. And they slew the kings of Midian , beside the rest of them that were slain; namely, Evi, and Rekem, and Zur, and Hur, and Reba, five kings of Midian—And the children of Israel took all the women of Midian captives, and their little ones, and took the spoil of all their cattle, and all their flocks, and all their goods. And they burnt all their cities wherein they dwelt, and all their goodly castles, with fire!"

Liliana's body was also surrounded by a blue ray of light. The hilt of her saber, Il Maestro, was also elongated which transformed it into the shape of a glaive.

"The hero takes up his bow and shoots a soaring arrow... Leaving a legend passed down the ages to this day without human guardianship."

In addition, Ena too began to chant her spell words as she wielded the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi——.

Each of the three girls went towards the newly risen ent demigod to deliver their strongest blows.

Erica flew straight up into the air and used her magic sword to mercilessly carve out the ent's flanks.

Gracefully moving around in the air like a swallow, Liliana sent a horizontal slice towards the ent's neck.

The ent stumbled after its legs were cut off by Ena's lighting strike. One of its legs shattered into pieces.

"Not putting up any resistance!?"

Liliana felt astonished and the other two probably felt the same.

After receiving three strikes, the ent demigod let out a loud cry.

oooooooooaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAAAANNNNNNnnnnnnnNN
……

Following that, the ent's body collapsed just like its predecessor, the divine tree, when it was struck by Jonathan's bow. However, after several seconds had passed——.

The golden oval floating in the night sky once again spat out another meteor.

As expected, another ent demigod being was produced.

Considering Christmas had seen better days, Godou's body violently jolted. It wasn't due to the extreme cold or because of fear , rather it was a tremble of excitement. The godslayer slightly sensed the aura of the enemy he would meet in battle.

"Its power has risen from before!?"

Having intuitively deduced this, Godou looked towards Yuri.

"I sense it as well. I'm afraid that as time elapses——as daybreak approaches, that divine tree will become more and more like a heretic god!"

"Furthermore, it will just revive no matter how many times you kill it….."

What a troublesome opponent. Godou could not help but smack his lips.

If the power of everyone assembled here was combined, the ent demigod giant could be smashed into pieces. However, if done like this there would be no way to solve the core of the problem.

"If only Yuri or Liliana could use spirit vision to see through the reason why this divine tree is able to continuously revive itself…..."

Erica mentioned as such. Liliana and Ena walked back together to Godou's location since they probably figured out that attacking the ent demigod was meaningless.

Furthermore, up until now the ent seemingly didn't have any intention to battle against Godou and the girls. There were differences in comparison to the incomparably violent divine tree. It was very quiet——like a genuine tree constantly towering there.

Moreover, it began to chant. The sound appeared to be coming from an opening that resulted from a split crevice.

oooooooaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAANNNNNNNnnnnnNNNNNNn……

A sharp jolt. Godou's body once again shuddered from excitement. If it continued to raise its power levels it will gradually approach the strength of a heretic god.

"Hey Godou, I have a suggestion."

"What is it?"

"Since that tree wants to transform into a god, we might as well not disturb it and wait a bit right?"

Godou was extremely surprised by that shocking statement. Erica calmly continued speaking.

"The most suitable weapon to defeat that ent is probably the spell words for the Sword right? Once we figure out his means of revival this mystery will be solved. Since we are already at this stage, it doesn't matter if the enemy is a divine tree or a heretic god since there isn't that much of a difference. If that is the case, don't you feel a more rewarding battle would be better?"

If he could defeat a heretic god, then Kusanagi Godou could attain a new ability. She was hitting on this point.

Detecting the meaning behind Erica's statement, Godou offered his reply.

"Of course not. Obtaining a deity's power has no importance to me. I already possess all the power I could ever want."

"All the power you could ever want? What do you mean?"

"Everyone has already assembled together like this right? Having partners together in combat who also care about me, this much is already more than enough."

His voice could not help but become emotional. Was it because of the current situation?

Towards this honest statement, Erica revealed a blossoming smile and Yuri also displayed a gentle smile. Liliana nodded her head, seemingly saying I feel the same while Ena too knowingly smiled.

"Onii-sama, I would also like to accompany everyone."

"Haha, Hikari has also helped us in many aspects."

The youngest hime-miko in training smiled as she spoke with Godou who nodded in response.

However, she still was only an elementary school student. If the situation had become more dangerous than it was now, then it would only be right to have her take refuge.

After he nonchalantly sent Erica an eye signal, she looked as if she already understood its meaning and redirected her gaze. She truly knew how to clue in on one's thoughts. That said——.

They faintly sensed that the restlessness had already unwittingly subsided.

“Furthermore, another reason is we don’t want that guy turning into the god Saturnus.”

Godou, who just remembered this point, spoke of the phenomenon that this god brought upon 150 years ago.

It was within the report sent by Lu Yinghua. In regards to this, the expressions of the girls became tense.

“I take that back. In the end, as a knight I cannot permit that kind of disorder occurring in Tokyo and brush it aside. Let’s quickly take down that ent.”

Even Erica’s facial expression was serious as she said:

“Since it is like this, we must quickly prepare the Sword.”

"Instead of the giant, the key should lie over there, right?"

Ena used her fingers to point towards the golden oval that emerged in the sky.

“Yuri, what is this coffin you mentioned just now?”

“Y-Yes, it looked like someone was buried inside. At least that was what I felt. That’s why I didn’t want to say the word coffin outright. Perhaps that was the coffin of the Grey One.”

“Speaking of which, that guy previously mentioned he was a god in the past.”

Godou nodded towards Yuri’s speculations.

“In short, if we could get closer while staying on the ground, then perhaps it shouldn't be up to me but rather Yuri who might be able to obtain a more detailed spirit vision."

When coming in close contact to a historical divine artifact, the success rate displayed in Yuri’s spirit vision is astonishingly high.

It was probably because of this that Liliana would have an expression of regret as she spoke. As a result,

"If it’s just getting closer then perhaps there is someway to accomplish that."

Yuri spoke in a soft and determined tone.

"Although, I'm not certain if going there will result in me obtaining a spirit vision.....but no matter what we must give it a try!"

After finishing her statement, the hime-miko crossed her arms over her chest and closed her eyes.

This was her praying stance. Following that, a faint white light arose from Yuri's body. Next, the ray of light ascended up into the sky like a pure white satin fluttering in the air.

"Spirit body separation! Isn't this the Princess's ability!?"

Consequentially, Godou remembered the conversation he had with Liliana.

The one who was regarded as Europe's highest ranking hime-miko was Princess Alice. Her secret technique was the ability to utilize psychic sensing from a spirit body detachment. Despite having her physical body slumbering in her residence at London, she was able to fly all over the world with her spirit body. Yuri was now able to achieve the same feat——.

Alice's spirit body was no different from her real body, but to Yuri this was still quite difficult. However, the resplendent ray of white light actually flew towards the sky heading towards the its target, the golden coffin!

Two minutes passed just like that. With her eyes closed, the hime-miko suddenly collapsed.

"Onee-chan!"

Hikari immediately came to help up her sister. Godou and the others also rushed over to her side to assist.

Yuri had an exhausted appearance as she weakly knelt on the ground while gasping for air. Because she used spirit body separation, her body was probably overtaxed.

She wasn't even able to look them eye to eye. However, during the intermittence of her gasping, the hime-miko quietly said:

"Godou-san, in the end.....I saw it."

"What do you mean Mariya?"

"T-The light, it's being hidden in the abyss of that coffin. That light is currently the underlying cause of this inextricable revival. If we can eliminate it then....."

She was finally able to stabilize her breathing. However, she wasn't finished speaking.

Yuri closed her eyes and then lost consciousness soon after.

"What does the abyss refer to?"

Godou felt perplexed as he looked up towards the night sky. The horrific oval that sparkled with golden light rays was hovering in the sky.

She said it was a ray of light in the abyss. Did it have to be sealed somehow? After all was said in done, Godou and the others were located on the ground. But as for a means of flying there..... they do have it.

Godou examined that approach but then hesitated. He once again reviewed his options.

Sure enough, there were no other alternatives.

"Hey Liliana, haven't you recently been saying that I have been too polite numerous times?"

Having an unrelated question being suddenly thrown at her, the female knight replied 'yeah, you're right' in response.

She didn't seem to understand and said 'why do you bring this up now?'

"Only during times like these will I impolitely request something from you. Furthermore, besides you there's no one else I can request. Please send me over there!"

The golden oval floating in the night sky was an existence that Yuri succinctly revealed as the coffin.

Godou pointed to that majestic sight as he pleaded towards Liliana Kranjcar.

Part 4

A period of time passed after Godou and Liliana took off.

Suddenly, the ent demigod let out a roar.

oooooooooooooooaaaaaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAANNNnnnNNNN
!

This one was a bit more intense compared to that steady cry from before. Its yell came from a crevice that was the equivalent of a mouth as it gazed towards the sky.

At the forefront of its sight was the golden coffin that Godou and company were heading towards!

"As expected, that coffin appears to be a crucial point for the ent as well."

"It probably became restless after it sensed Your Majesty and everyone closing in on it."

Erica muttered in response while Ena offered her speculations.

The only two battlers left on the ground were those two. They had already decided on what should be done next. Erica and Ena wordlessly exchanged eye signals and each understood the other's intentions.

Just when they did that, the ent demigod raised its elongated right arm into the air.

A wooden staff suddenly appeared in its hand. The wooden staff was divided in two at the end, giving it a shape that resembled a tuning fork.

In addition, dozens of vines emerged from the ent's bulky legs. All of the vines were lengthy, thick, and possessed a curved body similar to a huge, lively snake, creating a whip-like appearance.

Moreover, a radiating green sphere of light glinted at the end of the two pronged tip. The sphere of light went into the sky——ascending towards the golden coffin!

Furthermore, it wasn't just a single shot. It felt like one after another were being continuously released.

Erica wasn’t naive as to perceive this bubble blowing-like action of creating those spherical bodies as some sort of exotic spectacle.

It was practically guaranteed that this was to impede the two people ascending into the sky.

"Hikari."

"P-Present, Erica-neesama."

"Leave this area with Yuri and find refuge."

"Me and Ena-san are heading out to deal with this, during that time I won't be able to protect you and your sister."

"——! I understand. This is in order to help Onii-sama and Liliana-neesama."

Although she was learning on the job, she truly deserved to be called a hime-miko. She was well-disciplined and thoroughly educated.

She sensed what Erica's intentions were and promptly nodded. Despite her young appearance, she was quite awe-inspiring and focused.

Hikari, who was still supporting her dazed older sister Yuri, departed from Erica and the others.

Speaking of which, during the battle with the Great Sage Equaling Heaven she was requested to do something similar as well. Remembering this, Erica let out a faint smile. In these various situations, Mariya Hikari might also become one of the members of the round table that follows Kusanagi Godou.

"Well then Erica-san, your move. Prior to this I felt those vines were similar to the Yamata no Orochi, making Ena fight an array of heads."

"Ara, the honor of being tasked with the objective of infiltrating the enemy's headquarters is of course mine."

"No matter, letting Erica-san have first crack at battling the army of heads is fine as well. However, if you can't exterminate them then Ena will have a lesser workload."

The Hime-Miko of the Sword fearlessly spoke. Erica followed with a smile in response.

Immediately after they jokingly agreed to share the task, the miko and knight speedily rushed in towards the ent demigod who was releasing those abnormal spheres of light into the sky.

Erica and Ena both dispensed spells that raised their body's agility and running speed to explosive levels.

The two of them kept rushing forward with incredible speed until they were in close proximity to the ent, around ten meters or

so away. However, dozens of vine creatures emerged from the ent's leg and started maneuvering themselves in order to block their path.

Ena wielded the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi to combat these vines head on.

Soon after, there was an opening——Erica plunged in without hesitation towards the ent’s chest.

Charging forth quickly in a straight line, she thrust the lance forward as if carrying out a knight's duty.

Erica displayed this sort of vigor as she suddenly charged in with a ferocious pace and thrust the lance infused with divine annihilation privileges forward, intending to jam it straight through the ent’s body.

It blocked the lance with its unexpectedly nimble left arm. However Erica didn't fret about this. She immediately began chanting spell words.

"Cuore di Leone! Bestowed with an archangel’s added protection, drive him away!”

Breaking down the obstruction, gnawing apart the enemy, it was the lion of steel.

The transformed barbed lance, which received Erica's orders for a surprise attack and the applied spell words, shot through the wooden ent's right hand. Penetrating through was the embedded privilege of annihilation.

Boom! The ent's right hand was blown off simultaneously with the sound of the explosion. The ent was gracefully blown away.

On the other side, Godou and Liliana were currently closing in on the golden coffin.

Before the silver-haired female knight took off using her most well-versed witchcraft, she inspected the golden coffin floating in the sky.

Then after she checked its location, she approached right next to Godou and utilized her flight magic.

The two of them were surrounded by a blue ray of light as they took off into the sky.

This was probably the fastest flight magic that humans could utilize. It was said that the flight distance was also pretty far. Assuming they were at the border of Europe, they could even traverse the entire continent.

Only witches like Liliana could apply this type of magic.

Except the user could not fly to a place they were not familiar with or cannot visualize.....

Godou unintentionally looked down and began to regret this. Below him was the capacious sea that was as dark as the night. At this far distance the nightly scene of Tokyo was still visible.The view was akin to standing on the 40th floor observation deck of a highrise surveying the scenery.

As of right now, a bizarre magic light was propping up his feet.

Flying like this was very harmful to the heart. Before taking off, he had asked Liliana if it was her first time reaching this high of an altitude through flying magic. She replied that in the past she would play around like this all the time.

"Kusanagi Godou, I can see it!"

Liliana controlled the blue light soaring in the sky as she spoke.

As for the golden coffin hovering in the sky——they were gradually approaching the dazzling bright oval-shaped light. At this moment, Godou realized this oval was much larger than he had anticipated when he was on the ground.

This elongated oval was about the size of a track and field stadium.

Well, now the real show begins.

Just as Godou licked his lips, he noticed the sphere of light attacking them from below. The sphere had a radiant green shine and was about four meters in diameter.

Furthermore, this radiating green light sphere had a speed that was noticeably faster than Liliana's flight magic. At a quick glance, there were about twenty or thirty spheres flying towards them right now!

Out of those spheres, the one leading the pack was about to catch up to the flight magic——

Pop. The spheres split apart like a bursting balloon, releasing a blast wave. The blue light from the flight magic maintained by Liliana shook. Godou's body also violently jerked.

"Guah.....!"

"As expected, it wasn't going to be easy getting there."

Liliana clenched her teeth as Godou mumbled to himself.

In truth, he was previously concerned that they would be obstructed while in the sky which is why he was hesitant in asking Liliana earlier. However, there were no other options besides giving up so he had no choice but to request her assistance.

The flight magic was only able to travel in straight lines.

If they were to come under attack in mid-air, it would seem like nothing could be done besides praying that the enemy misses.

Since it was like this, Godou, who was unable to avert his gaze away from the golden coffin, contemplated for a moment. After making Liliana bring him to this point, he seriously had

considered the idea of descending into the coffin by himself. Then he would proceed to see with his own eyes what was actually within the coffin.

However, even if the situation had already turned into this, leaving Liliana by herself in the sky would result in her being harmed first.

There was an option that allowed the two of them to charge into this dangerous situation together. However, if that was done, it will result in her being exposed to another danger——

"Kusanagi Godou, do I have to repeat that statement once again ?"

"Eh?"

"I believe what I previously said should already be enough. That said, don't you feel that we have already overcome many dangers together up until now? It’s far too late for this kind of concern."

Godou couldn't help but look at Liliana's face. Compared to her serious statement, the fairy-like girl had quite a mischievous smile.

"It's already too late.....right."

"Yeah. Too late."

Godou felt deeply ashamed after she immediately replied like that. Perhaps this really was the case.

Think about it, Liliana and the other girls would always encounter many dangers because of Kusanagi Godou. Furthermore, they always stayed by his side even though he would always incite these situations. And in the end, they would fight together, shoulder to shoulder, charging into the face of danger.

"Liliana, continue heading in that direction. Rush into that ray of light!"

"Got it!"

Immediately after, the two of them surrounded by the light of the flight magic dashed into the golden coffin.

Chapter 7 - Arrival of the Winter Festival

Part 1

The oval of light possessed a radiant glow.

After entering inside this oval, the very first thing he experienced was a bright golden light that overwhelmed the eyes.

There was a hard to describe floating feeling. Then all of a sudden, there was a sense of falling. These experiences seemed to be cycling through him. After repeatedly undergoing this state of mind, Godou's vision was restored.

"What the hell? Where is this?"

What laid in front him was actually a wheat field glinting in golden light. There was a bumper harvest with piles and piles of wheat heads, as if the magnificent brightness of treasure had been brought onto the farmland. The boundless farmland went as far as the eye could see.

It wasn’t really an unlimited expansive universe, but rather it was simply an endless wheat field.

Furthermore, a reddish-hue from the sunset could be seen by looking up into the sky. The setting sun over the golden wheat field dyed everything orange, making the coloring increasingly luminous.

To him, who viewed the Tokyo night sky not too long ago, there was an excessive feeling of uneasiness.

"This place is within the coffin right?"

"I'm afraid this place is the inside of that divine artifact, the Crown of Saturnalia, and was probably created through some kind of curse or the power of a god was used to construct this space."

Right by his side, Liliana appeared to be surveying this wheat field with an investigative look.

"I sense the aura of a sacred domain within this space. However , I'm not completely certain that this is the shrine."

"It can be anywhere for all I care. Anyway, we probably barged into that grey bastard's abdomen."

Indeed they were located at the core of the opposition. It was impossible to call this a safe place.

"I'm sorry for dragging you into this kind of place."

"I don't mind. Didn't we already go over this before? We are king and knight. A relationship like lovebirds, like conjugated branches, or one equal to that of an affectionate couple's covenant. "

Liliana pledged with the expression of a stern female knight.

"And besides, I feel like this is definitely my duty."

"Duty?"

"To stay by Kusanagi Godou's side and never stray."

Liliana looked directly in Godou's eyes, speaking as if she was making a vow.

"When overcome with difficulties, you are someone who would select to charge right into the enemy ranks first. Furthermore, even with your ordinary lifestyle, you possess this exceptional talent of already being caught in danger before you know it."

"T-That counts as talent?"

"If the position was a butler or a maid, most likely anyone could fill that spot. However, frequently accompanying you, becoming your sword and shield to support you, there is probably no one other than me that could undertake this duty."

She spoke in a calm manner that projected her ego and beliefs.

The art of fighting, magic, knowledge, she was adept in each of these aspects. She even possessed the spirit vision ability, allowing her to correspond to every situation. Furthermore, she also possessed the physical strength and agility to keep up with Godou. Because she was a witch who was proficient in understanding natural and supernatural phenomenons, no matter what the situation was, she had this quality of always playing a significant role.

Her statement was perhaps in the form of a testimony.

Or maybe she really does have the highest qualification to become the personal adjutant for a guy like Kusanagi Godou.

In this light, Erica, Yuri, and Ena definitely did not.

Kusanagi Godou was appreciative of Liliana's generosity, but at the same time, he tried to cover up his embarrassment and said:

"Even so, I'm old enough that I don't need to be protected to this degree."

"If that's the case, then let's call it monitoring personnel instead. In this instance, I stepped aside just for a bit and now look, you were already caught in this kind of disturbance."

Liliana joked around with a smile and then took out her cellphone. Attached to the top was the female bear strap they had won in Odaiba some time ago.

"However, there have been quite a lot of annoying events occurring. The opportunity to do that kind of thing with you will probably be limited to just that one occasion."

"S-So it's like that.....?"

After Liliana abruptly said that, Godou could not help but become speechless.

After recalling their interactions at Odaiba from this conversation, he felt a different kind of awkwardness. He involuntarily tilted his head. Liliana, who for some reason had a

very jubilant expression as she narrowed her eyes, gazed towards him.

It was getting increasingly awkward. Godou, wanting to conceal the embarrassment, surveyed the surrounding wheat field.

"We should probably start heading out. Where should we go?"

"Let me do a quick investigation."

Liliana closed her eyes. She seemed to have used witchcraft to transfer her vision into the air. After a few minutes, she reported back to Godou.

"There's a building in that direction. It appears to be an abandoned shrine."

The direction Liliana pointed to was straight north. It just so happened to be in the opposite direction of the setting sun.

Well, who knows if the sun in this realm also sets towards the west.....

In short, the two of them began moving north. However, this place was still the enemy's headquarters. Soon after, a person appeared to block their path.

It was the same guy that was previously seen a couple of minutes ago, the sailcloth enwrapped divine spirit.

"Godslayer, you've actually entered here——"

The Grey One's manner of speaking consisted of half praise and half amazement.

'It is time for me to stop wandering in a corner of the stage. Quickly return to the surface. Go battle the newly-sprouted divine Saturnus that I have bred.'

"No, what happens on the surface no longer matters because we are going to settle things here."

Godou calmly spoke.

Back at Rinkai Park where they had their reunion, in his mind he held back the impatience of wanting to confront the Grey One.

However, right now he no longer has that state of mind. Even he could not fathom why. On the contrary, at the moment he was still able to calmly engage in what will probably be the last bit of conversation between the him and the divine spirit.

"I'll get straight to the point and ask, do you have any intention on giving up reviving the god? If you have this sort of motive, we can discuss the question of where you can take shelter after taking care of this disturbance."

'You ask too much. I am a shadow that only strives for the revival of Saturnus, the god of bountiful harvests.'

As the Grey One twisted his body substantially, he muttered:

'I don't know what you are conspiring by trespassing on my sacred domain, but for the time being I shall use whatever strength

is left in this body to obstruct your path. This is because my sprout is close to becoming an actual god!'

Multiple black colored crosses emerged from the golden wheat field basking in the sunset.

Each cross had a length of around two meters and there were approximately more than fifty in quantity.

Relatively speaking, these crosses were being overly produced at a rapid speed compared to the crops in this sacred field.

Moreover, these crosses then floated up into the skies overlooking Kusanagi Godou's position and then rapidly descended with lightning speed.

"And they took all the spoil, and all the prey, both of men and of beasts. And they brought the captives, and the prey, and the spoil, unto Moses."

Following Liliana's chant of the knightly holy spell words, she fired an arrow of blue light.

The magic sword she wielded, Il Maestro, also transformed into a silver longbow. The fired arrow was infused with the sacred privilege of extermination.

Right after the arrow left her hand, it immediately split into ten separate arrows.

These arrows pierced through all of the crosses which numbered over fifty, instantly vanquishing them. Following that,

Liliana immediately kicked the ground and sprinted towards the Grey One. Her movements captured the gracefulness of a swallow as she closed in on him while changing the shape of the silver longbow into a sabre.

In a flash, Liliana's sword elegantly sliced the Grey One's body.

Following that, the divine spirit's body dissipated into black sand. However——.

'Hahahaha, do you really think an attack of this degree would ever destroy me? I am immortal. I'll continue accompanying you guys.'

The intermittent laughter of the Grey One echoed from the black sand.

Even though there was no wind at the wheat field, the scattered sand began floating up on its own and assembled into a human-like shape. At the same time, there were black crosses continuously emerging from the ground.

"There won't be an end in sight if this keeps up."

Liliana muttered this line and then sent an eye signal to Godou.

Realizing her intentions, Godou converged by her side. Subsequently, the girl who was a personal knight and witch used her well-adept flight magic, escorting Godou into the air with her.

Liliana used her flight magic to send Godou inside a certain building.

It was probably the building that was previously described as an abandoned shrine. However, Godou was unsure whether or not Liliana's idea was the correct one.

This was because all the walls of this building were sprawling with mysteriously planted creeper plants and thorny undergrowth . The foliage was even spread across the entire floor and all of the pillars, making it difficult to clearly distinguish the building's overall structure. Through the small crack within the intertwining vegetation, a white stone surface could be seen.

Furthermore, since the creeper plants and thorny undergrowth were spread all over the place, it was impossible to find the building's entrance.

"For the time being we should try to clear these... The seeds of green which manifests these grounds, pay tribute to the witch descendants."

Liliana muttered and proceeded to touch the creeper plants in front her with her hand.

As a result, the green creeper plants, thorny undergrowth, and vines that were blocking the shape of the building gradually diminished, finally retreating back into the ground. It was pretty much like a video recording of the vegetation’s growth reversed.

With this, the shape of this building could be clearly ascertained .

It was a white stone-made building. The structure had few walls and was spacious, with round and thick rock pillars neatly arranged.

After entering the building with Liliana, they arrived at a vast courtyard.

At the center of this place, there appeared to be the white colored pedestal to an alter. Godou examined the emblem carved on top.

".....It sort of resembles the shape of a bird."

The inscribed design on there appeared to be a bird with its wings spread out.

"Speaking of which, the Crown of Saturnalia also had a similar shape."

Compared to the Crown, the bird form was more noticeable in the stone object's design.

Godou felt suspicious. He had this gut feeling that he had already seen this same design somewhere before.

At this time, Liliana, who was by his side, suddenly shouted:

"The marking of the sun which reigns the heavens! Plus it is the icon that symbolizes Ahura Mazda[27]. Could it be Mithra[28]!?"

Ah I see, so it was Mithra. As a result of Liliana's statement, Godou remembered.

This was the design he had seen before in Napoli. Perseus——also had an insignia that was the same symbol as the divine Roman hero, Mithra.

"Could this be Perseus' shrine?"

"That is a possibility. Except, if we were to consider this design the symbol of a sun god, it would be widely known throughout the East. The same could be said about the Roman Empire worshiping Saturnus."

"It looks roughly like a sun god's symbol."

During his discussion with Liliana, the silver-haired witch squinted, unable to take her eyes off the inner part of the shrine.

"The setting sun.....leaving traces of sunlight——?"

"Did you see something!?"

She was perhaps inquired due to being bestowed with a spirit vision. Towards this, Liliana nodded.

"Yes, let's go. The reason why the divine tree sprout of Saturnus revived.....I think I already figured it out. Basically, the answer should lie within the inside of the shrine"

Part 2

Before continuing onwards inside the shrine, Liliana once again utilized her witchcraft.

She intentionally retracted the creeper plants to cover up the shrine again with their green stalks and foliage.

"If the grey divine spirit comes here, then we will let these kiddies block him. Incidentally I have also implemented barrier magic. Even though it isn't as sturdy as Erica's senatus consultum ultimum, if it's just for buying a couple minutes it can still play a substantial role."

Godou should be able to guess his counterpart's intentions based on this explanation.

While wandering around within the shrine, Liliana delved more specifically into what she mentioned before.

"For the divine artifact that cult leader Luo Hao termed as the Crown of Saturnalia——I believe its origins lies not in Saturnus but a different god instead."

After walking along a corridor that was surrounded by stone from all sides, they encountered a staircase that led underground.

Of course they would head downwards from here. Like the setting sun changing its spot of radiance over the ground during

dusk, the underground passage did not get any illumination. Through the use of magic, Liliana lit up the path ahead by summoning forth blue colored wisps.

"In fact, my familiar didn't sniff out the earth's aura from the Crown of Saturnalia and Saturnus is clearly the god of earth's bountiful harvests."

Speaking of which, he had previously witnessed this. Godou recalled the boat excursion from before.

"Kusanagi Godou, the immortality you are probably most familiar with are the divine traits of the Snake goddesses. Well, besides those, what other types of gods do you think utilize immortality?"

"......Surely they must be sun gods?"

With the emblem they saw in the courtyard and the direction this inquiry was headed, making this kind of connection was henceforth guided and should have been obvious.

"That's right. Despite the sun disappearing after sunset, in the morning it will reappear across the eastern skies. Although weakening during the times of winter, its strength will gradually recover following the approaching spring. The Sun and Snake both possess the divine attribute of immortality."

"In other words, that bastard Perseus still exists somewhere at the moment?"

Godou felt his previous suspicions have been answered. At the time, he did defeat Perseus at Napoli. However, having not gained any authorities afterwards, he believed the reason was Perseus was definitely still alive.

"If only that grandiose guy didn't bring trouble upon humans....."

Even though he always gave people problems, how could anyone hold everlasting hate towards the handsome divine hero.

Towards Godou, who recalled Perseus's sumptuous words and actions, Liliana said:

"The name of the god of agriculture originated from the appreciation of the year's bountiful harvests and the festivals praying for bountiful harvests the following year. The festival would be held at the end of the current year, using the winter solstice as the set date."

"......Going back to that, why does Saturnus get revived during the winter solstice?"

Godou spoke of the suspicions he harbored before.

"The current calendar and the calendar of ancient Rome's are different right?"

"Yes, in the wake of change in both the country and time period, the calendar utilized will also change. However Kusanagi Godou, the winter solstice is actually not influenced by that kind of

behavior. The so-called winter solstice occurs when the night is at its longest during the year or when the day is at its shortest. In other words, it's the day when the distance of the sun is furthest from the earth."

"I see. What's important isn't the calendar but rather the position between the earth and the sun."

As the two of them were conversing, they had already reached the bottom of the stairs. They finally arrived at their destination.

This expansive basement made out of stone was most likely used as a chapel.

At the center there was a black wooden coffin resting flat on the ground. An unusually intense magical power trickled out from the interior. Sensing this, Godou casted an eye signal towards Liliana.

After his partner nodded her head in confirmation, Godou placed his hand on the coffin's cover.

He hastily lifted up the cover. Inside was a human body that resembled a male at the prime of his life. On his face was a mask made out of gold with a distinctive lion design on it.

Furthermore, there was tattered yellow clothing on the body. In the past, it probably would have been a golden color.

He tried squeezing the clothing. Underneath was the physique of a robust male body.

After briefly coming in contact with the body, he could feel the body temperature transfer to his hands. Next, he checked for a pulse but was unable to confirm if there was a pulse for life. He then tried placing his hand by the heart. However, the beating ceased in this aspect as well.

He wanted to get the mask off but this was not an easy task. The mask seemed to be tightly bonded to the face.

"What the heck? Is this guy still alive?"

"No, it's a dead corpse——the corpse of a sun god from the past ."

Liliana responded with her judgment using a serious tone.

It wasn't just her tone of voice, she even revealed a rarely seen distant gaze. It was obvious the spirit vision revelation was the result of her being affected by the magical powers released by the corpse.

"Furthermore, this is considered to be the main body of the divine artifact, the Crown of Saturnalia.....In the past, the master who heretic Saturnus served....."

'Witch, do not speak any further!'

Suddenly, a voice came from above.

'Don't break down my fall from grace again! It's humiliating. It's a history of defeat. My former defeats must be sunk in the abyss of darkness forever.'

The ground rumbled as it swayed, the walls shook, and the cries of the birds could be heard above the ceiling.

It was basically like an earthquake. Perhaps the cause of this was the arrival of the Grey One. If the basement collapsed from this, would the two of them be buried alive? Godou swiftly said:

"We better quickly escape. However, how do we deal with this thing?"

Godou contemplated as he looked down at the coffin lying there which held the sun god's corpse.

On the surface, the coffin would appear to be extremely heavy if they tried to carry it and it was uncertain if there was any value in doing so. However, leaving it here unattended seems improper as well——.

On the other hand, with a dissatisfied expression towards Godou who was deep in thought, Liliana said:

"Did you forget about the barrier I deployed not too long ago? Didn't I say that it could hold out for a couple of minutes? If the barrier isn't destroyed, the most that divine spirit can do is convulse the ground to this extent."

After being told this, he recalled. Liliana must have known something like this would happen in advance.

Towards the nodding Godou, the faithful knight went a step further and said:

"Kusanagi Godou, although the opponent is a divine spirit, it should be able to withstand for a few minutes."

"?"

"What I mean is, for the time being we should be fine!"

Liliana's face was entirely flushed as she shouted. What point was she trying to get across?

Godou reflected over this and then immediately figured it out. In short, she was referring to the action they had performed many times up till now. Godou could not help but attentively watch the shuddering Liliana whose lips appeared to want to say something.

Noticing Godou's line of sight, she suddenly hung her head down. However, she quickly gazed back up, seemingly to try and peek at Godou's facial expression. Liliana displayed a rarely seen prying glance as she looked upwards.

Seeing her seldom used expression, Godou's chest started to beat intensely.

"C-Can this place hold out for the time being....."

"Y-Yes, since I figured this kind of situation would occur, I was deliberately attentive....."

Because Godou was timorous with what he should say, he simply inquired a meaningless verification.

For Liliana, despite it being a meaningless verification, she offered a response while still shyly peeking up at Godou.

——Godou took a deep breath. What should he say during times like these?

Even until this day it remains unclear as to why whenever such moments arise, everyone becomes restless. However, not saying what needs to be said during such instances is unacceptable and thus he has to formulate a plan for this. Afterwards, he made up his mind.

He essentially had to muster up even more courage than when battling a god in order to say it.

"Although it always turns out this way, this time I really do require assistance. So.....please help me."

Well, to one's surprise he was unable to even state his request. Even he felt no progress was made.....

Despite this, after steeling her determination, Liliana deeply nodded.

"My answer to that.....would be the same even today. For the sake of completing the task of forging the Sword, I will never

decline regardless when it occurs. This time, please allow me to battle together with you."

Murmuring those words, she calmly closed her eyes.

Godou realized that the resulting embarrassment was probably because they were on the verge of performing that action, or perhaps it was anticipation that caused Liliana's body to slightly tremble.

Those extremely adorable rigid movements and sincerity of hers pushed Godou over the limit.

Godou vehemently held Liliana's lavish figure and planted a kiss on her lips.

"Ah....."

The supposedly stern and imposing knight nevertheless percolated a faint sigh from her lips.

However, she and Godou both had the goal of forging the Sword. She immediately spread open her lips, accepting the lips of Godou.

Merging together, the pair of lips were tightly bonded as they shared the sensation of each other’s lips.

Following that, Liliana began speaking quietly.

"This corpse.....I'm not sure if this was someone giving the final send-off for the everlasting sun. Rather than being a god of that same category, perhaps it is related to an ancient godslayer——"

The basement still rumbled from the non-stop shaking. However, Godou and Liliana paid no heed. The two of them exchanged kisses while savoring each other's heart and knowledge .

"Except, once dead, his corpse didn't actually perish and still remained on the surface. Thus, it became a divine artifact with immortal divine qualities....."

Liliana utilized Instruction magic. Due to the efficacy it has, vast amounts of knowledge and mental images started to transfer over. The Crown of Saturnalia, Godou and the others have seen this divine artifact before but only the outside of it. The concealed coffin existed within the interior.

The corpse laying there was the actual divine artifact——!

"In the distant past, the soul lodged within this corpse turned lackluster over the course of many years, eventually transforming into the grey divine spirit.....Therefore, it was probably able to move due to the divine artifact's will and spirit."

Her cute, quiet murmurs and gasps for air poured into his mouth.

As Godou was receiving all of this while kissing Liliana's lips, he extended his tongue in. Her tongue initially recoiled from surprise but then proceeded to grasp the thrusting tongue of Godou. Their tongues intertwined over the course of this tongue lapping as they shared each other's sensation.

From this point onwards, the degree of intimacy between them surged greatly. Their heart-to-heart connection also became much more profound——.

This sequence replayed in his mind numerous times in the past.

However, Godou noticed he clearly wanted to implore his feelings and interact even more intimately. His counterpart did not respond in kind though. Her tongue movements became clumsy and overall her lips became stiff.

Perhaps that was the reason why the transfer of knowledge was somewhat slow and the information quantity was less compared to usual.

Liliana appeared to have something holding her back.

Was it because she was bothered by the grey divine spirit's meddling?

"Are you concerned about the situation on the outside?"

"Ah, yeah. Everyone on the surface.....obviously Erica and the girls are engaged in battle, but I'm the only one who is letting these thoughts affect me.....I'm very sorry....."

Liliana casted her gaze downwards and quietly muttered those words.

"I figured I would have to compete over meritorious services to monopolize you.....but to be kissing you like this is....."

This was what snatched the determination from Liliana's heart.

The cause of this appeared to be a sense of sinning rather than vigilance. Even Godou's heart was pressed with a heavy burden after hearing Liliana. He felt it was cruel to conduct this sort of act with Liliana in a location where no one else was around and it was eating at him like the pressure felt prior to a competition.

——But instead, Godou shook his head.

The person who must bear through this was him, Kusanagi Godou.

After Godou gave Liliana a gentle kiss, he then immediately tilted his face downwards and proceeded to slowly slide his lips down to suck on her slender neck.

"Uhn.....ah!"

Due to his sudden incursion, Liliana's body trembled slightly.

Godou disregarded this while he sucked on her neck. He let his tongue slide upwards as he kissed her once again on the lips.

Furthermore, he planted a kiss on her rose flushed cheeks. Closing in cheek-to-cheek, he kissed Liliana's ear and then clamped her earlobe with his lips. Next to her ear, he finally whispered:

"The one who entrusted you with this duty is me, so you don't have to worry about it. At the very least, just try not to think about anything right now."

"But——ah!"

Because Liliana appeared to want to say something, Godou gently bit her earlobe.

He nibbled on it as if he was amusing himself. However, her fairy-like body once again shuddered for a moment and tilted backwards significantly. Also, her lithe body mass was completely entrusted to Godou as she tightly hugged him.

While being hugged, Godou re-embarked on kissing Liliana.

Compared to before, she was already much more relaxed while accepting him. Liliana opened her lips and stuck her tongue into Godou's mouth. As if wanting to moisten his lips, she attentively licked the lips of the man she considered as her master.

"W-Was that your command? As a king——no, as my master?"

"Y-Yes."

"Since it is like that.....then I guess there is no other choice."

It was obvious that Liliana's words did not contain any intention of giving up.

These were the words of someone intending to ignore a guilty conscience, implying premeditated criminal intent. Afterwards her gaze dulled, she reinforced the strength applied to Godou's arms in their embrace.

"In reality.....whenever I'm by your side I've always wanted to do this. However, I'm Kusanagi Godou's knight. These matters are not permitted. That is why――"

With their faces near each other, Liliana's face playfully rubbed against Godou's face.

"That is why only now, only during these times are there exceptions. However, you don't mind right? Liliana Kranjcar is the knight who frequently accompanies you, someone who will never leave your side. Starting today, no matter how many times these opportunities arise, I will always――"

Compared to any random love proclamation, this knight presented a more sincere, a more serious oath.

Godou denied her the chance to finish speaking by blocking her mouth with a kiss. Liliana boldly opened her mouth and latched on to Godou's entire lips as she took them in.

Then all of a sudden, Liliana forcefully thrusted in her tongue in search of Godou's tongue.

"The grand celebration of the winter solstice within the agricultural domain occurs on the day when the night is at its longest. In other words, starting on that day, the days will gradually become longer, gradually approach spring....."

She gently pecked at Godou's lips and tongue. Licking everywhere, she savored the taste as she spoke. At the same time, a

tremendous amount of knowledge rushed into Godou's mind through this contact.

"As a result, the so-called winter solstice is actually the beginning of the end of winter. It has become the celebratory time for the arrival of spring. In short, another way of putting it would be――"

"The day of resurrection for the everlasting sun. This is the day commemorating the return of its strength after weakening during the wintertime."

Liliana's lips squirmed as she replied. Godou also lusted for her lips.

Their lips intermingled with the two of them seemingly competing for who has the more passionate kiss.

"Yes. There is also another thing. Saturnus was imprisoned by the main Roman god Jupiter[29]. Due to a life of suppression, Saturnus lost his mind which caused Jupiter to imprison him in the depths of this shrine. There were only seven days during the year where he would set him free. This legend has precisely become the key to Saturnus's connection to corpse of the sun god――!"

They completed the magical ritual for conferring knowledge through the link between their hearts.

With this result, they finally achieved what they wanted. Just as the sword that can slice through divinity appeared from Godou's body――.

Crack! There was a sound like shattered glass.

It was the collapse of the barrier Liliana constructed, serving as an alarm indicating the intrusion of the Grey One.

Part 3

Erica was a specialist in steel-based magic.

The forged steel transformed into a blade. With the weight it had, it could even be used as a blunt instrument to crush people. If heat were to be added, the blade would dissolve and anything that came into contact with it would all melt into the molten metal solution. Furthermore, ever since ancient times the sturdiness of steel had been utilized in a warrior's armor.

By saying she was adept at utilizing steel, it meant that she was also adept at offense and defense.

On the other side, Ena, who wields the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, heavily favors offense over defense.

She was basically someone who could scramble all over the place, like a child of nature who possessed the movements of an agile monkey. Similar to how one engages defensively by bunkering down somewhere, she was more suited to shifting around indefinitely, using tireless movements to initiate an assault or guerrilla warfare.

——On the ground at Kasai Rinkai Park.

Erica, who was fighting with the ent demigod, unwittingly displayed fluid synchronicity in combination with Ena's battle style as they fought side-by-side.

Through the course of battling against the Great Sage Equaling Heaven and divine ancestor Guinevere, she had become exceptionally compatible with the Miko of the Sword when attacking in unison.

oooooooaaaaaaAAAAAANNNnnnNNNNN！

The ent demigod roared and raised its two-pronged weapon.

From the tip the double prongs, spheres of green light were being emitted. It was the same thing that previously attacked Godou and Liliana in the sky. Once it ruptured, it would generate a shock wave blast.

Upon seeing dozens of these spheres of light heading towards her, Erica chanted her spell words.

"By the rank of Legatus Legionis, I hereby command!"

Following that, she retrieved the Cuore di Leone from the sky.

Immediately after, the barbed lance that had transformed from the magical lion sword instantly multiplied. Like copying and pasting, the appearance was exactly the same as the lances continuously materialized in the air. It wasn’t just one or two additional lances, there were eighty-one in total.

"Gather here, the Phalanx! Construct a bed of iron and steel, hold out and persevere!"

The legion of spears responded to Erica's spell words and began darting around as they moved in an orderly fashion.

Following that, a nine by nine dense square grid was produced. Erica arranged this grid in front of herself and Ena.

The spheres of light created by the ent demigod flocked towards them.

Before the spheres of light arrived in close proximity to Erica and Ena, the lances that were awaiting at that location pierced through all of them, causing them to rupture. The green spheres of light exploded in rapid succession, resulting in violent shockwaves .

"Guah——!"

Erica prevented the impact from this attack by implementing protection magic to guard herself and Ena.

The shockwaves were dispersed from where they were standing as they blocked the attack gracefully. At around the same time, Ena also made her move.

Lowering her body, which at the same time lowered her center of gravity, she rushed towards the ent demigod.

With wind-like speeds, she passed through the grid of spears that was created. During this time she did not even slow down one bit as she dashed along the ground like a scurrying wolf.

Moreover, in one breath she was already in close proximity to the ent's legs!

There to impede her were the large vines that bore from the ground.

These vines were eliminated by Ena not too long ago as though she was killing weeds with the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi at the time. They were previously exterminated, however they have all once again been revived.

The group of vines, like snakes, lunged out in a whip-like attack .

Ena easily evaded the attack, but in addition to that, she even used the vine as a springboard to gracefully leap out of the way. She exhibited the nimbleness of an acrobatics master.

However, she only avoided the attack and did not engage in a counterattack.

As to why, it was because the pitch black divine blade was actually not in the hands of the Miko of the Sword at the moment ——.

"Make haste and manifest upon here the semblance of Chihaya's power of metal destruction!"

Ena jumped from place to place while chanting spell words.

Responding to the spell words, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi that was hovering in the air descended quickly.

Before charging in, she first tossed the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi into the air, the pitch black divine blade stayed in the air floating, waiting for a chance to attack.

oooooooaaaaaaaaaaAAAAAAAANNNNNNnnnNNNNN！

Sensing the incoming attack, the ent demigod once again intended on raising his two-pronged weapon.

However, Erica had already prepared countermeasures to this.

“Oh hammer of steel, rout thy enemy!”

Nine of the lances from the lance grid flew up, thrusting towards the two-pronged weapon that was raised. The weapon was pierced, shattered, and penetrated through by the multiple lances. In a split second, it was disposed of.

Following that, the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi descended towards the ent's head from the sky like lightning——.

If one were to describe it, it followed a straight path through the body of the ent demigod. From the head to the throat, then esophagus, all the way through the bum.

Unable to bear the attack, the thirty meter tall ent body split in half.

The full force of the blade was like a hatchet cleaving through firewood.

Even though the opponent was an ent, a divine beast, under normal circumstances that strike would be enough to obtain victory.

However, after clearly being punctured by the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the ent's body began to regenerate. The two sliced up halves of the ent once again tightly fastened together like the north and south poles of a magnet.

Furthermore, the recently assembled ent spat out some sort of object from its mouth-like slit.

It appeared to be a poisonous fine powder.

This powder scattered around the ent, resembling yellow sand or the proliferation of pollen.

Naturally, Erica and Ena instantly leaped away from this.

"Be careful! This powder gives off a nasty smelling odor. It is probably poisonous!"

Due to the smell carried by the wind, Ena probably deduced this fact and stated her warning.

As expected of her extraordinary sense of smell. This child of nature had an acuteness that was incomparable to the norm. Moreover, she chanted her spell words right away.

"It is by its breath / That autumn's leaves of trees and grass / Are wasted and driven... So they call this mountain wind / The wild one, the destroyer."[30]

Gusts of powerful winds gathered around Ena's body.

The miko of the god of storms, Susanoo, was also very adept in manipulating wind-based magic power. The poisonous yellow powder was whisked away by the strong winds and dispersed over the ocean.

"Under these conditions where our offensive force is unable to overcome the enemy's power of revival, we will have no way of ending this."

Just as Erica acknowledged the battle's bleak outlook.

The radiant golden oval located far above them had been deemed by Yuri as the coffin's existence. Hovering around the quaint object in the winter night sky, one could see the familiar-looking ray of light gradually glinting brighter.

"During December, the festive ritual of the winter solstice would be held in ancient Europe. It was a festival meant to congratulate the harvests of those years and to pray for a bumper harvest in the coming years."

Whenever Godou softly chanted the spell words for the Sword, there would be blades of the Sword emerging from his surroundings.

In the center of the vast basement, Godou was under Liliana's watch as he chanted away. Becoming Verethragna's final incarnation, the Warrior, he pulled out the god slaying blade.

"The winter solstice is a grand festival commemorating the revival of the sun. Within agriculturally rich nations and colonies, it is the ceremonial holiday of winter and spring, a commemorative festival where the people would indulge in raucousness and merriment making."

'Oh! These rays of light, these spell words, do you plan on elaborating my history!?'

The voice of the Grey One came from above.

Following that, the entire basement shook, the ground jolted intensely. If compared to the Richter scale, the level of shaking could be considered above a category five earthquake. Godou lost his balance and fell down.

However, Liliana promptly rushed over.

The silver-haired girl put her hand on Godou's back and caught him as he fell. She then helped him get back up.

"There were many sun gods in ancient Rome. The most representing would be the sun god Sol[31]. There was also Apollo,

also known as Apollon in Greece. Arriving from the east is the hero Mithra."

Liliana's body was slender and lightweight. Her limbs were like that of an elegant fairy.

However, during this turbulence, she actually became the crutch steadily supporting Godou.

Godou thought about the unexpected role reversal of relying on her delicate body while diverting his attention onto his partner.

Ena, who was still in battle on the surface, wielded the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi——.

Located far below at Rinkai Park, he called upon the divine blade's strength.

"You should be one of the aforementioned gods, an ancient Roman sun god who reigns the skies. Before the loss to a certain opponent, in the olden days you were a magnificent radiant god of light."

Godou briefly mentioned this towards the Grey One.

He was chanting out the habitually used divinity slicing sword as well as the power of the Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi. In the past, he had used this blade during the battle against Athena. Fusing the two swords, these were the spell words of the divinity sealing artifact.

"It isn't certain which sun god you are. However, having been majestically worshipped during the winter solstice grand festival of the sun, you probably also confer blessings to the Roman citizens."

'Alas! Desist, Kusanagi Godou!'

The Grey One had already ceased his begging, instead his words were expressed in a pleading tone.

'Tearing my soul apart, these spell words are meant to seal my existence! This kind of conduct is truly intolerable!'

He had never heard a punitive voice like this before coming from the mouth of any god.

So it's like that. Godou understood. Over 1500 years ago, he had lost his divinity as god. There is the fear that he was the same as those divine ancestors——existences like Guinevere.

An ascended being who reigns above humanity. However, the kind of power and spirit it possessed was incomparable to a god.

He was a degraded soul who lost his greatness and strength in the past.

"The corpse from when you were a sun god transformed into a divine artifact used in the recreation of the winter solstice festival. The divine artifact also serves to revive Saturnus, the god of the

grand festival of bountiful harvests. As a result of this, while Saturnus was the god of earth, he was also a servant to a sun god ——a slave god in servitude."

Godou's spell words, which gave rise to the Sword, was in the process of gradually building up.

Without knowing it, the entire basement was already at its limits. The countless number of golden light rays, which flickered like the glint of treasure, illuminated the insides, extending towards the walls, floor, and ceiling.

First order of business was to slash apart the vast basement.

This was to rip apart the divine artifact known as the Crown of Saturnus from the inside, thus sealing it.

Godou had not ceased chanting as he further weaved his spell words.

"Saturnus was an imprisoned god. Locked in the abyss of a shrine by the main Roman god Jupiter, only once every year would he be granted freedom for just a week."

The countless number of swords turned into a vortex of light, slashing the entire basement apart.

Moreover, the stone material vanished after being cut.

Since he had already wielded the fused Sword and Ama no Murakumo no Tsurugi, the divine artifact sealing blade, it was expected to be capable of extinguishing the building.

"Those seven days are the week of the winter solstice. Even though Saturnus is considered a god of earth, he is also a god with no freedom at all and is only released during the start of the celebratory festival for the revival of the sun. With respect to this aspect, Saturnus has become the people's subordinate sun god!"

Every time the golden Sword sped off towards sky, the domain of a certain place would be exterminated.

It took basically around ten seconds for the swords and the blades of light to go from the basement to atop the flight of stairs. Furthermore, it marvelously vanquished the shrine located at the top.

In addition, even the forever boundless golden wheat field and the red dyed dusk sky perished.

Having returned to a normal state, Godou and Liliana found themselves already located in the sky. They were standing on the bird shaped emblem rooted in the Kasai Sea. The two of them firmly stood atop the stone-made bird.

The ground was no longer shaking. However, Liliana was still supporting Godou's body.

Furthermore, the one who stood right in front of them was the already familiarized Grey One.

The royal corpse he was carrying was the ancient sun god wearing golden clothes and a gold mask from back when he was a deity――.

'Kusanagi Godou! Although I'm already a divine-less god, I still have aspirations to face off against a godslayer! How about it, battle against Saturnus.....!'

"I'm sorry, I no longer wish to accompany you in your mischief. "

Last month Godou had previously fought against Lancelot, the hero god of war.

Nevertheless, he actually wanted to decline this spirit's request. He wanted to avoid engulfing Tokyo in a crisis at all cost. That was more important than any of his desires.

After only slightly reminiscencing over this point, he felt his prior impatience boiling within him.

Once he had confirmed again with himself that he did not want to display the above mentioned leniency towards the culprit for this event, Godou sought out the swords hovering around him.

It appears there were still over a hundred of those radiant golden spheres of light.

In one breath, the group of swords shining even brighter than the twinkling stars found everyday in the night sky started to speed up due to Godou's command.

"I am the strongest, holding all victory in my hands. Man and devil——all enemies, all who harbor enmity will be vanquished!"

Responding to the holy words of Verethragna, the grid of radiating swords of light endlessly darted around.

Afterwards, the Grey One along with the corpse of the sun god he was carrying were completely slashed apart, torn into pieces, and finally vanquished.

The only object that remained intact at their location was the mask that was modeled after a lion.

At the same time, the stone constructed bird that was previously their foothold was also eliminated.

Their bodies naturally started to plummet. Godou immediately hollered.

"Liliana!"

"Got it!"

This sort of brief exchange was already more than enough for the two of them.

Liliana utilized flight magic while still holding onto Godou. The two of them took off as they were enveloped by a blue light. They intended on landing at the surface of Rinkai Park. However before touching down, they gradually approached the leftover golden mask suspending in the air.

Fearing this mask was the Crown of Saturnalia, the actual immortal divine artifact itself, it was imperative that they retrieve it and hand it over to his sworn elder sister later――.

Godou extended his right hand as he grabbed it.

Afterwards, their attention was focused downwards since they were approaching the ground. Getting an overview of Kasai Rinkai Park like this was a very rare opportunity.

One could see the broad green grass fields, forests, parterres, the massive Ferris wheel[32], the park's central jogging trail, the aquarium, etc.

In addition, the ent demigod was currently wielding its two pronged weapon in the grass fields. The mess over here had to be cleaned up as well.

In order to finally put an end to everything, he chanted the following spell words.

"For victory, hasten forth before me.....O Immortal Sun, I beseech thee to grant radiance to the stallion. O Stallion that moveth godlike with wondrous grace, bringest forth the halo of thy master――."

Serving the Grey One was the subordinate god Saturnus.

150 years ago, he brought disturbances upon the earth as a heretic god. Having led the people into a frenzy, it was expected that he had fulfilled the prerequisites.

The offender had caused havoc to the masses, fulfilling the requirements of the White Stallion——.

After witnessing the signs of daybreak displayed from the east, it could be said that everything went directly according to plan.

Without discussing anything, Erica and Ena both nodded and quickly initiated a retreat.

Daybreak was definitely still many hours away. However, a rosy hued dawn emerging from the sky could already be seen and at the same time the ent demigod unleashed a ferocious roar.

Following that, a spear of white light, equivalent to that of a solar flare, headed towards the seaside park.

This ray of light——Verethragna's third incarnation, the White Stallion, easily engulfed the ent. It was completely incinerated, disallowing any possibility of a revival as the ent evaporated.

In addition, before the target had been eliminated, the colossal Ferris wheel got caught in the line of fire from the beam of the White Stallion——the so-called Kasai Rinkai Park was synonymous with the enormous recreational facility, which had also been engulfed and annihilated.....

"Well, even though Godou wanted to battle, the result still turned out like this."

Erica shrugged as she stated this once everything within the park had already settled down.

The abnormally timed daybreak had already vanished and the winter night once again stretched across the sky above. The shining resplendent golden oval that was previously hovering over Tokyo Bay also disappeared at the same time.

In the end, peace had once again returned to Tokyo Bay and to Kusanagi Godou's surroundings.

Of course, that is if he were to disregard the complicated post-processing issue involved.....

"Hey, is that His Majesty and Liliana-san?"

Ena pointed to the sky where there was a blue colored meteor streak.

The orbiting blue body in the sky descended to the ground. There was nothing else it could have been besides the radiance emitted from Liliana's flight magic.

At the same time, the sisters of the Mariya household also came over.

With her state of mind having pretty much returned to normal, Yuri looked up and noticed Erica and Ena's line of sight. Her little sister Hikari happily laughed, brimming with vigor as she waved her hand in their direction.

"Looks like we've finally resolved this situation. Get Yuri over here as well so we can discuss the next line of business."

"Yes, you are referring to the Christmas party right?"

A laugh escaped out of Erica upon hearing Ena say this. She shook her head in response.

The demoness smile, as it was commonly referred to by Godou and Liliana, formed at corners of her mouth. It was a gorgeous smile but it was also a trademark of Erica Blandelli that carried nefarious intent.

"Nope, we have to discuss how we are going to tease Godou and Liliana once they return."

"T-Tease!?"

"Yes, although I had predicted things would turn out like this the moment they took off into the skies, who knew it would be exactly as I expected. It's fine if we deliberately make things awkward for them."

"Ah, they must have went through the preparations for the Sword."

Ena also noticed the issue and regretfully muttered.

"With that said, should Ena also take part in making things hard on His Majesty?"

"Yes, it's just ever so slightly while not overstepping a lady's preferences."

"I suppose you're right. Since it would be beneficial, it can't be viewed as a detestable matter."

Erica suggested with a smile that could be described as no way inferior to that of a court lady offering counsel to the king.

On the other hand, Ena also revealed an audacious and mischievous smile.

"Well they should be back here any moment. Let's quickly get ready."

"Understood. Hey Yuri, Hikari! Hurry over here. We have some matters to discuss!"

For now the world was at peace. Kusanagi Godou's surroundings seemed to have returned back to its usual smooth sailing and dispute filled lifestyle.

Part 4

Previously they had to deal with the sun god's divine spirit and the divine tree that practically transformed into a heretic god.

After the two of them had been killed, Kusanagi Godou's surroundings swiftly returned to normal. They say Sayanomiya Kaoru and Amakasu Touma, those involved that possess strong magical powers, were able to maintain their memories regarding their time under the curse's influence.

"As expected, these god related incidents contain all sorts of troubles."

Amakasu commented as such before bidding farewell to Godou .

However, only after this incident's occurrence was he able to do his business with a lethargic attitude, something which rarely happens. The information cover-up done by the History Compilation Committee did not require much work this time.

On the eve of the winter solstice there were numerous wisps hovering over Tokyo Bay.

There was also the battle engagement with Godou and the others at Kasai Rinkai Park.

Those nearby who witnessed these scenes had forgotten everything related to these strange phenomenons.

Due to Saturnus's memory manipulation curse, it had a wondrous use in dealing with the situation. It could be said this was an unexpected by-product? That was the opinion of the History Compilation Committee.

Of course, Kasai Rinkai Park showed clear traces indicating a battle, hence it had already been sealed off.

"Perhaps this was a gift sent from heaven as an early Christmas present."

Towards the wryly smiling Kaoru, Godou felt very apologetic.

Many times while dealing with a situation's aftermath they would be busy nonstop because of the godslayer residing in Tokyo . Hence, he naturally lowered his head.

On the other hand, normal people with no knowledge of wizardry lost their memories with regards to the succession of disturbances.

The strange phenomenon with Santa Clauses turning grey was forgotten as well. Because of this, Kusanagi Godou's close friends had already forgotten about the disruptive matters he was involved in.

Well, he noticed there was a strange rumor being subtly passed around Tokyo regarding the mysteriously obtained grey Santa Claus outfits……

Initially, Liliana, who acted as the organizer, offered this proposal.

Speaking of matters involving him, the Kusanagi household was going to be the gathering place for the Christmas party.

"Right now it would be very hard to arrange it at an establishment, how about we just hold it at my place?"

"My apartment could also work. However, I plan on having Arianna take a vacation from the 24th till New Years. Then again we can't just count on her."

Erica suggested this but Godou then replied as follows.

"Since my grandpa isn't home for the time being and my parents shouldn't be back any time before Christmas, let's just gather at my house. Shizuka also said she would be at home that day."

"Shizuka-san will be home?"

Yuri asked and Godou nodded in response.

"Uh huh, although she originally said she was going to hang out with her friends from class."

After hearing Godou mutter 'since no one will be home, I'll have everyone come here', Shizuka canceled her own plans from before.

"Since it's that kind of gathering, then I'll be home on the eve of the holidays as well. I must prevent onii-chan from messing around in our house!"

Shizuka, what kind of person do you take me for?

Godou contemplated whether or not to confirm with Shizuka at this late point in time. No matter what, the location of the party was already decided on. He also sent an email notification to Ena who returned to her parent's house at Chichibu after the battle at Kasai.

'Understood. Ena can bring all kinds of food.'

He received a concise reply from her.

And as such, December 24th, Christmas Eve, had arrived at last.

At 2 o'clock in the afternoon on the 24th, Godou received three emails from Nanami, Takagi, and Sorimachi.

All of the emails were briefly written. Nanami's email didn't even contain any words, just a sole picture attachment.

'We just began scaling this dangerously steep slope'-Sorimachi

‘Without an understanding of love, you won't be able to understand this sorrow'-Takagi

There was also the photo attachment by Nanami.

The scene he saw in the photo was Nanami, Takagi, and Sorimachi cutting up a Christmas cake and preparing a barbecue with the camping tools at some unknown park. There wasn't anyone else in the photo besides them. It seems like a gathering with just the three of them.

By the way, the three of them all expressed a look of complete discontent.

Instead, there was a sense of solemnity wafting around as they stared at the food with a challenging expression.

Godou unwittingly looked up towards the sky. It was an abnormally clear day, the atmosphere of a snowy Christmas did not seem to be in sight. However, not only was there fierce winds today, it was also very chilly.

——Today seems quite unsuitable for an outdoor barbecue...

While emotionally staring at the picture of the three idiots, Godou felt a bit doleful. What intense emotional disturbance occurred to cause something to this extent?

"Is there something wrong onii-sama?"

"Umm, yeah. It's the email I got from my friends from class. Although I planned on inviting them to attend today's gathering, however for some reason my invitation was declined."

Because of the winter solstice incident that led to Godou's surroundings being turned into a mess, the three idiots gave off the impression that they have seen through everything. However, how come after everything returned to normal, these guys are even more depressed than before the incident's occurrence?

"Well, I guess they're pretty happy this way so whatever."

Godou muttered to himself as he walked with Hikari along the streets of Akasaka. They were going to pick up the cake they ordered for today's party. The two of them met up in the morning and embarked on the bakery after eating lunch.

Afterwards, they were currently on their way back. Godou was carrying a bag that contained a square box.

"There's going to be many people attending. It should be quite exciting."

Godou and Hikari, who cheerfully spoke, were heading towards the station.

——By the way.

The reason why he was with Hikari was actually because of the request Erica brought up after the battle at Kasai. Like a noblewoman at the time, she firmly stated:

'Hey Godou, lovers in Japan all go on a date just between the two of them on Christmas Eve right? Since it's like that, would it be alright if we did the same as well?'

'Eh?'

'Well, however, there are other girls besides me, Erica Blandelli, present. So for that reason I'm willing to grant you the privilege of selecting whoever you want.'

'W-What? It was hard enough taking care of these various situations, don't start with this strange nonsense!'

'That's right Erica, right now the most pressing matter to discuss should be the issue regarding the crisis aftermath...'

Godou was panic stricken. Liliana, who was by his side, intended on making an excuse.

However, Erica calmly revealed a demoness smile towards all this.

'Since for some reason you guys are so mindful towards what I'm saying, then let me ask you two a question first. When you guys were up there battling, how did you guys forge the sword?'

'Huh?!' 'What!?'

Godou and Liliana were completely speechless towards the blissfully smiling Erica.

'Speaking of which Godou, you can't say it was forced upon you due to the situation... Or anything along those lines. Liliana, despite your persistent adherence to the ways of a knight, you still preemptively went in without any hesitation. So who are you going to pick out of us?'

'She's right, even if you occasionally perform such actions, it still isn't worthy of a punishment.'

Ena nodded towards what Erica had stated.

'Originally I had wanted Yuri and Ena accompany Your Majesty somewhere together, however today I kind of want Your Majesty to only select Ena.'

'A-Actually.'

Lastly, even Yuri shyly spoke up in a firm tone.

'Perhaps Godou-san goes beyond just occasionally in initiating these matters.'

Afterwards, the girls all fixated their gaze at Godou.

They all showed a wordless expression that urged him to promptly make a selection. No matter who he selected, it would definitely result in controversy. Being instinctively aware of this aspect, Godou yelled out:

'H-Hikari! Then I'll go with Hikari. We had already arranged this before!'

Being the older one, the option of looking over the youngest child was of course the proper and unpunishable one.

That night, Godou was fortunate to have Hikari present as they walked along the road to the meeting place of the Christmas party. The twelve year-old girl by his side was cheerfully smiling.

"Hey onii-sama, I don't mind if you have to rely on me during times like these."

She cheerfully spoke with a tone of reliability that also seemed to make him feel his future was bleak.

Within the living room of the Kusanagi household, his sister Shizuka spoke while holding back her rage.

"All the way up until this year, I had always monitored onii-chan very closely so he doesn't stray to the path of evil."

"Turn evil? Godoh-kun is a proper and well-behaved kid."

Revealing a warm smile, the person who joyously spoke was Koudzuki Sakura.

It could be said that she was the equivalent of a relative to Godou and Shizuka.

“Only the aspect of a proper child holds true. However, onii-chan is definitely not a well-behaved child! Throughout the many generations of men in the Kusanagi family, the only one who showed any capabilities was grandpa. That person took care of onii-chan ever since he was in kindergarten. Furthermore, the misbehaving bloodline that wasn't even cured during any of the generations had been inherited from father!”

"Hehehe, grandpa and Genzou-san are both outgoing people."

Towards Shizuka who was getting more and more agitated as she spoke, Sakura calmly nodded along the entire time.

"If you just mean outgoing then that's fine, but those two are definitely indecent people. Despite onii-chan being an honest and decent person, he gives people the impression that he is firmly on the path of going rogue. Jeez, how come all the men within the family are so troublesome..."

"I see, looks like there's a steady trend of people being born like this."

Upon hearing Shizuka despairingly comment, the girl by her side who was attentively listening acted as if she was well-versed in these matters.

"That's totally like Goro-san, no wait, really this is typical of Godou-san's family lineage!"

"Oh, Sakura's friend is here. Do you know onii-chan?"

After being inquired from Shizuka, the young girl——No, Renjou Fuyuhime lowered her head while having three fingers resting on the tatami.

From the looks of it, compared to Shizuka who was in her third year at middle school, Fuyuhime clearly looked much younger even though she was in her first year of college.

“I’m the heir to the Renjou family, Fuyuhime. I believe that in the future I will have some serious “business-like” dealings with your onii-sama. I’ll be in your care.”

“Eh? Business-like?”

“Yes, if it is specifically a “contractual marriage” or even just a “ sham marriage”, I wouldn't mind at all. I just want to climb higher, attain a higher position. I must achieve an even higher rank than my childhood friend Kaoru!”

“Eh?”

“Ha ha, Fuyuhime-chan has recently been going on and on about that. If her relation with Godou-kun gets better, she could rise above others or something.”

“W-W-W-W-Wait a second, how could someone so young be saying something like this!?”

"No, I'm already a college student! I'm the equivalent of a mature woman!"

Sakura naturally chuckled. Because Fuyuhime's dilemma of having the outer appearance of a little girl, there was a dwelling fear in her statement. Fuyuhime pouted, stating that she was a mature woman.

At this time, Tokunaga Asuka, a resident who lives nearby, showed up.

"It's still as rowdy as ever. Is there a party today? Here, this is for you guys."

She was the childhood friend of the Kusanagi siblings and the daughter of the owner of a sushi store (Toku Sushi). She appeared to be well acquainted with them to be freely able to open the front entrance. Gazing inside the house, she handed over the sushi container.

"Asuka-chan, excellent! I just so happen to be looking for an assistant!"

Shizuka walked out the door and collected the sushi container. Hence, the pigtailed childhood friend revealed a distressed expression and replied apologetically.

"Ah... I'm sorry. Later today there is going to be a Christmas girls only gathering. I'm going to go karaoking with my single friends. Shizuka-chan, even though it is a long, arduous battle, you must persevere."

"Eh——. Recently, onii-chan's level of uselessness has been increasing three times faster."

Towards her older friend, Shizuka puffed out her cheeks in anger like she normally does.

"There's no way I can single-handedly maintain the front lines. Absolutely no way."

"However, aren't all the girls who are well acquainted with Godou gathered together? It seems very tiresome, so please allow me to decline——eh?"

Behind the stiffly smiling Asuka, a girl wearing an apron walked in.

"I'm sorry, I forgot my manners."

The girl wearing the maid attire deeply bowed, took her shoes off at the doorway, and entered the Kusanagi household. She speedily walked into the kitchen.

Her silhouette and footsteps really gave off the impression of a capable person.

"T-The maid just now, who was she? E-Even today she wants to cosplay!?"

"That isn't cosplay. Don't you know? That person is a maid within Godou's 'good friend' Erica's family."

"There... There's actually people like this gathering here? Goodness gracious, what the hell does that guy plan on doing!?"

Asuka suddenly became furious after being provoked by the arrival of the unexpected person.

"Shizuka-chan, I withdraw my previous statement. Once I'm pretty much through with karaoking I'll come back here. Before then you must keep at it by yourself. You mustn't let that guy have his moment of glory!"

If Godou were to hear his childhood friend's proclamation, he definitely would have said something along these lines.

I have absolutely no idea what kind of glory you're talking about... Rather, every day is full of troubling and stressful issues...

On the other hand, within the busy party prep kitchen of the Kusanagi household.

"No... I guess Japan is better after all. Living here even cleanses the soul."

The person who sighed was Lu Yinghua who just made his return yesterday.

He was sitting at the kitchen table with the responsibility of peeling the skins of the vegetables. Incidentally, he didn't use the easy to use peeler, opting to use a kitchen knife instead.

“I don’t care what happens, it’s great to be far away from master. I would never be able to experience this kind of liberating feeling in mainland China. Even in Hong Kong there would be guys in connection with master.”

He spoke while peeling non-stop.

Furthermore, he was not only fast but accurate as well. His vegetable peeling surpassed the speed and precision of any machine. He didn't even cut one millimeter into the body of the carrots and potatoes.

There were three girls looking on in awe of his prowess.

These were the girls who cooked today’s dishes in the kitchen, Liliana, Yuri, and Ena.

“Lu Yinghua... Your cooking abilities are rather superb aren't they?”

“Almost like a professional... No, I think even specialists who are this skilled are quite rare.”

“And while clearly using a hard to peel tool...”

Lu Yinghua was just cutting up the ingredients.

However, his techniques and posture gave off the air of a chef. With that being the case, his cooking must be pretty good as well.

“I wonder how it will turn out. Although I’m confident it won’t taste bad, but whether or not it tastes delicious is quite unclear...”

Lu Yinghua replied nonchalantly.

As he gazed at the blade of the knife, his eyes were filled with somber after recalling a person from his dark past. During this time his hands never stopped moving.

"The responsibility of cooking falls onto me during master’s imprisonment. If I cook anything that isn't to her liking, there will be torture awaiting me. By all means I want to avoid that kind of effort with my life on the line. As for food, clearly that bag of instant food products sold by peddlers should already be more than enough!”

“Wow... If it’s like that, then his cooking should be even better than Yuri’s right?”

“Even though this is simply just going by word, it definitely wouldn't be wrong to assume that is the case...”

“It’s because he was cooking for someone supreme every day. This is probably just a different form of training. If we were to compare our skills, to him this wouldn't even be a contest...”

Just when the girls directed their gaze of admiration and sympathy to the youngster.

"Hi everyone, cheers for all your hard work."

Arianna Hayama Arialdi entered the kitchen.

She cheerfully made her greeting and placed the plastic box she brought onto the table.

"Well Anna-san, I heard starting today you're on vacation right ?"

Yuri smiled as she welcomed the well-acquainted maid and helper of Erica.

"Yes, since I was allowed a break from now till New Years I scheduled a visit with my grandparents in Nagasaki. I wanted to send you guys some gifts of appreciation before heading out."

Arianna's parents were Japanese.

This maid, with no negatives other than her stew making and driving capabilities, happily pointed to the plastic box on the table.

"Inside is some barbecued pork that I stewed for three days and three nights. Even though it's my first time trying to make something like this, it wasn't too hard to do. Please be sure to give it a taste!"

The three of them already had experienced Arianna's pot-stewed dishes before.

At this time, Yuri, Liliana, and Ena all involuntarily paused since they didn't know what to say. On the other hand, not

knowing the dangerous nature of the situation, Lu Yinghua went " hmm", and returned back to his work with an uninterested gaze.

Afterwards, the sun began to set as Christmas evening soon approached.

Godou, who had been holding on to the cake, and Hikari arrived at home. Lastly, the blonde beauty also showed up. She seemed to have dropped by for a bit at various other gatherings before coming here.

"Although this speech should be made before the start of a party when one receives their guests, I'll just make it brief to prevent it from being boring or strange. Everyone, please enjoy yourselves tonight."

Even though she was the last to arrive, she still pulled the stunt of a lead actor.

Following this habitually magnificent display of technique that was Erica's statement, was the commencement of this small-scale party.

Well, that wasn't really a big deal. It's just a gathering among close friends to have a drink, eat, and chat.

However, to Godou, these were people who he hadn't known for more than ten months.

Hence, he couldn't help but somewhat let out a sigh upon seeing the people gathered at his house.

Erica, Yuri, Liliana, Ena, Lu Yinghua, Hikari.

And there was Shizuka, Sakura, Fuyuhime. From the looks of it, Asuka might come over a bit later as well.

Even Kaoru made a sudden appearance at the party. It was rumored that she could stay for around two hours or so.

"This year surely was exhausting. Ah, Godou-san, perhaps next year we should go on that vacation I mentioned before. If the two of us form a pair, I believe we'll have lots of fun during our travels! "

Before he knew it, she once again referred back to the previously mentioned matter of vacationing just to go hit on girls.

Plus, she even invited Amakasu but he declined by saying 'I have work to do'.

However, just a while ago when Kaoru arrived she said 'this is from Amakasu-san'. It was a basket filled with fried chicken. Originally he thought it was bought from a store, but it was actually made with his own two hands.

As the party progressed, the drinks were pretty much finished.

As expected of Erica, she brought a couple bottles of wine. Ena too had calmly come over with a liter bottle of indigenous liquor that was to be consumed at the dinner party etc. If things were to continue like this, then all these drinks that Godou had previously banned before the start of the party would have to be allowed.

Because of this, Godou left the house to buy some beverages.

Christmas Eve.

Godou left by himself and headed towards the nearby convenience store.

He inadvertently gazed into the sky. Because it was winter, the stars twinkling in the sky appeared to be more vivid and beautiful than any other season. Just when he noticed the three stars of Orion.

The cellphone placed within the bag started to sound. Looking at the display screen, it was Liliana who made the call.

"Everything ok?"

'You're going shopping by yourself? Was there nothing to drink ?'

She suddenly responded as such.

Because everyone was currently vivaciously partying, he decided to silently leave the house without saying anything.

Godou confidently looked back. As if it was to be expected, Liliana was currently walking in his direction. Furthermore, even Erica, Yuri, and Ena came along.

"On a hard earned day of celebration, you shouldn't be stealthily coming out here by yourself right?"

"Moreover, there is going to be a lot of things to carry so I'm here to help."

"That's right. You should have some people help you even for something like this."

Seeing four of his friends catching up, Godou couldn't help but smile.

Even though it was unimportant, it was still something that made him happy.

This reconfirmed his feelings of joy from the recent battle at Kasai. He had friends by his side who were troublesome at times, but they also care for Kusanagi Godou.

He felt that there wasn't anything else in any aspect that he looked forward to that held greater value than this.

Godou walked with everybody as he took another look at the sky.

It was indistinguishable from the starry night from his previous viewing.

However, for some reason he felt that the night sky was even more lustrous than before.

Epilogue

Godou was aware this was occurring within a dream.

After spending a lively Christmas Eve with his friends, he was supposed to be sleeping soundly on his bed. But instead, Kusanagi Godou's consciousness was currently wandering on a wide plain who knows where.

Looking up at the sky, he saw a waxing crescent moon.

Other than that, this was a desolate land without anything of note.

Neither creatures nor buildings were present. If anything, the scene amounted to a sea of tall silver grass growing haphazardly where one could vaguely sense a mysterious atmosphere of incoming autumn.

Godou's attention was drawn to the sounds of a stringed instrument reverberating across the desolate plain.

The tone color did not resemble that of the Japanese zither known as the *kin*. Undoubtedly, this wondrous melody was filled with exotic foreign flavor. Regardless where the tune was first composed, it must have originated somewhere far to the west of Japan.

Otherwise aimless in the dream, Godou could not help but begin to wander across the wilderness in search of the musical performer.

Less than half a month had passed since he last listened to Luo Cuilian's *yueqin* performance in a corner of Mount Lu. Perhaps because of that, Godou was certain that the person playing the melody was definitely not his sworn elder sister.

Perhaps the performer was someone whose heart was burdened with inextinguishable sadness and regret?

Such an image surfaced from a corner of his mind. The delicate and persisting tune was infused with emotional pulsation, thereby causing Godou to feel uncharacteristically sentimental.

At this time, a voice reciting a poem could be heard extremely close by.

In yonder days, there was an evil dragon in the sea. The king immediately drew his bow and shot an arrow, wounding the dragon right in the chest—

The instant this voice entered his ears, Godou could not help but tremble.

The feeling was as though he was hearing a song in praise of an enemy for whom he was destined for an inevitable encounter. A song that filled him with a sense of hostile, oppositional and competitive spirit.

In any case, Godou quickened his pace and approached the owner of the voice.

Pushing the tall silver grass apart, Godou was finally able to see the singer playing the instrument.

"It's you!"

Godou was struck with surprise, for the person on the opposite end of his sights was someone he had seen before.

Sitting upright and dignified amidst the vast wilderness of the plain, gently caressing a trapezoid zither on her lap was a princess dressed in a magnificent *Juunihitoe* kimono with long, gorgeous, flaxen-colored hair and eyes as clear as crystal glass.

The Princess of Glass whom Godou had encountered multiple times in the Netherworld.

Noticing Godou's arrival, the princess stopped plucking the instrument in her hand and a faint smile appeared on the corner of her lips.

"I have been waiting for quite some time, Rakshasa Monarch. As for the impertinent act of appearing in Your Highness' dream without prior consent, I do humbly beg forgiveness."

"That's completely not an issue. But why are you in my dream!?"

Faced with Godou's confusion, the Princess of Glass gradually brightened her smile.

"In actual fact, I received a request from your adoptive mother, the goddess who urged me to deliver this message to you no matter what and bestowed upon me in the Netherworld the technique of dream encounters."

"Adoptive mother—in that case, it must be Pandora?"

The one who proudly declared herself his adoptive mother with excessive frivolity. As might be expected within a dream, Godou swiftly recalled memories from the Netherworld.

The Princess of Glass politely confirmed Godou's question with an answer of "Indeed."

"Come to think of it, I cannot see her easily unless I use that [Ram] something or other. But anyway, why did she ask you to deliver her message? Are you very close with Pandora or is there some other reason?"

"My former self and that goddess' ancestor... If you trace back to their very roots, one could consider them as sharing the same homeland. That is the nature of our relationship."

The princess brushed the issue aside with a vague answer. Godou did not pursue the matter any further.

After all, it was probably a long story. Instead, Godou chose to cut straight to the chase.

"So, what is the message?"

"Yes, King Perseus, whom you recall, was recently slain in preparation for when the 'King's Arrowhead' shall enter the battlefield. Please be extra careful."

"Perseus slain!?"

"Indeed. The 'Arrowhead' is the divine child's blade which stands equal to the Divine Sword of Salvation. A blade that shall one day tear you apart and bring forth destruction to the land. For the sake of the soon impending day of battle, please bear this firmly in mind."

The princess bowed her head deeply. Godou expressed understanding.

Indeed, this should be a warning of the "King of the End," the strongest [Steel].

"Very well, I will try my best to remember this, to suddenly beware of a guy whom I've never even seen before. But then again, won't I forget everything in the end once I wake from the dream, just as always?"

Godou's question for confirmation caused the princess to suddenly smile and answer cheerfully.

"Please rest assured. Even if you were to forget the words, your ferocious soul shall never forget any precautions related to battle—Moreover, this applies even more to Kusanagi-sama's words compared to mine."

"So this is really a warning?"

"No, you are simply being informed of a premonition. However , perhaps something unexpected may happen?"

At some point in time, the Princess of Glass had started gazing gently at Godou.

Her word choice also shifted subtly, showing slightly more affection.

"The inevitable encounter with the arriving 'Arrowhead' will undoubtedly prove to be a threat. However, ill fate is not everything it entails. Although it is not a certain goddess' box, when all disasters are over, hope will surely appear."

"Hope huh."

Watching Godou's face as he muttered to himself, the princess nodded.

"Fufu, among all god-slayers in history, your attitude towards power is especially free and unfettered. Perhaps because of that, you might obtain power instead. I—once known in the past as... The Goddess' Daughter, pray for your victorious fortune in battle, Kusanagi-sama!"

The Princess of Glass smiled as she spoke these words.

Unfortunately, Godou did not catch her words clearly because his consciousness was rapidly getting hazy.

As he gradually woke up from the dream, surely early Christmas morning was arriving. After waking up, memories of this unexpected gift would surely vanish.

Be that as it may, Godou thanked from the bottom of his heart this modest gift delivered by these female acquaintances.

Afterword

This series has finally reached the publication of its twelfth volume.

The story that began in spring has finally reached winter, while the interpersonal relations between characters are approaching completion. Furthermore, in accordance to the current volume's theme of the "winter festival," it would be great if everyone could enjoy the story... And ignore the fact that the actual season differs rather substantially from the publishing date (wry laugh).

Also, that particular exalted person makes a long-awaited reappearance.

Within the story, she mentioned she had defeated a certain god in the past. At the time, she acquired an authority conferring strategic and Feng Shui properties, thereby "massively raising the agricultural productivity and economic power of the town where she resides." So long as she remains present at a location, the shocking truth is that the city will develop without hindrance!

Were she a feudal lord or general in an SLG simulation game, this would definitely be considered cheating. "Possessing greatness beyond all emperors" is something only a person like her could boast.

Oh, by the way, this ability does not activate without a minimum threshold population. Hence, it is completely useless at her current residence (deep in an uninhabited mountain)...

Well then, the TV anime gradually approaches with the passage of time.

Production is going smoothly! ...I am praying for the best while I work on promotional activities (laughs). Broadcasting is set to begin July on various channels including Tokyo MX, Sun TV, TV Aichi, BS11 and AT-X.

The PV has already been released to the public at the promotional event as well as the anime website.

Whether or not it is due to author bias, I think that everyone will definitely look forward to the anime once you watch the PV, so please show your support and check it out everyone.

The next volume is scheduled for release during the summer. However, the storyline is still set in midwinter.

That said, since it is the summer season after all, missing out on oceans, swimming pools and similar settings and the various naturally accompanying outfits would be too much of a shame.

Hence, I've come up with a story idea that allows summer and winter fun to be enjoyed simultaneously. If possible, please look forward to the arrival of the vacation story in the next volume.

Takedzuki Jou, April 2012

Translator's Notes and References

1. ↑ **Paella**: Spanish dish; the main ingredient is rice, often colored with saffron (or similar), and accompanied by assorted vegetables and either meat or seafood.
2. ↑ **Marco Polo**(September 15, 1254 – January 8, 1324) was an Italian merchant of Venice, a traveler, as well as an explorer. It was during China's Yuan dynasty where he arrived in China via the Silk Road accompanied by his father and uncle. Once Marco Polo returned to Italy, he was captured for the first time during a naval battle between Venice and Genoa. In the prison, he orally recounted his traveling experience allowing Rustichello da Pisa to write《The Travels of Marco Polo. However, whether or not he actually did go to China led to controversy. September 7, 1298, Marco Polo was sent to prison and cooperated with Rustichello da Pisa to create The Travels of Marco Polo.
3. ↑ The《Orient Travelogue, namely the The Travels of Marco Polo, was a literary work composed in 1298 detailing what the well-known Venetian merchant and adventurer Marco Polo saw and heard along his orient travels. The Travels of Marco Polowas the world's first literary work of abundant information about China reported by the Europeans. It detailed the situation of many countries in the areas of Central Asia, South Asia, Southeast Asia, and so on as well as had an important section pertaining to information about China.
4. ↑ **Bunkobon:** In Japan, these are small portable paperback books
5. ↑ Japanese Railway

6. ↑ The yuzu bath, known commonly as yuzuyu, but also as yuzuburo, is said to guard against colds, treat the roughness of skin, warm the body, and relax the mind. Consuming pumpkins during the Winter Solstice supposedly helps prevent sicknesses as well.
7. ↑ Guanyin is the bodhisattva associated with compassion as venerated by East Asian Buddhists, usually as a female. The name Guanyin is short for Guanshiyin, which means " Observing the Sounds (or Cries) of the World".
8. ↑ Acala (literally "immovable" one.) is one of fierce, angry-faced guardian deities of Vajrayana Buddhism, otherwise known as esoteric Buddhism, and is particularly revered by Buddhists in Japan.
9. ↑ Nattō is a traditional Japanese food made from fermented soybeans. It is popular especially as a breakfast food.
10. ↑ In Roman Mythology, Saturn is the "God of Time". Saturn is Cronus from Greek Mythology, who escaped the wrath of Zeus. Then within Greek mythology is Chronos who is the Greek God of Time. Long story short, Cronus=Saturn
11. ↑ Freyr is one of the most important gods of Norse paganism . He was a god of the sun and rain, and the patron of bountiful harvests.
12. ↑ Dagda is an important god of Irish mythology. His attributes are a cauldron with an inexhaustible supply of food, a magical harp with which he summons the seasons, and an enormous club, with one end of which he could kill nine men, but with the other restore them to life. He also possessed two marvelous swine---one always roasting, the other always growing---and ever-laden fruit trees.

13. ↑ The Water Margin, a story set in the Song Dynasty, tells of how a group of 108 outlaws gathered at Mount Liang to form a sizable army before they are eventually granted amnesty by the government and sent on campaigns to resist foreign invaders and suppress rebel forces.
14. ↑ **Style name**: a Chinese style name, also known as a courtesy name, was a given name generally used after the age of twenty as a sign of adulthood and respect. The use of style names have fallen out of tradition since the early twentieth century.[1]
15. ↑ **Friendship between gentlemen...**(君): a saying that originates from the Daoist philosophical classic, *Zhuangzi*(莊子). The full saying is "Friendship between gentlemen, they say, is insipid as water; that of petty men, sweet as rich wine. But the insipidity of the gentleman leads to affection, while the sweetness of the petty man leads to revulsion. Those with no particular reason for joining together will for no particular reason part."[2]
16. ↑ **Kabukichou**(歌): an entertainment and red-light district in Shinjuku, Tokyo.[3]
17. ↑ **Seven Sages**: the Seven Sages of the Bamboo Grove were a group of Daoist scholars, artists and musicians in the 3rd century China.[4]
18. ↑ **Moon guitar**(月): a stringed traditional Chinese instrument that resembles a lute with a round body.[5]
19. ↑ *Qin*(琴), by Chinese poet Bai Juyi() from the Tang dynasty. The qin is a classic Chinese musical instrument.[6]
20. ↑ **Saturnus**: the Latin name of the Roman god Saturn who was identified with the Greek god Cronus.[7]

21. ↑ **Yakushima**(屋): an island covered in dense forest, located south of Kyushu and designated as a UNESCO Man and the Biosphere Reserve.[8]
22. ↑ **Shirakami-Sanchi**(白): a mountainous area of unspoiled forest located in northern Honshu, and is a UNESCO World Heritage Site.[9]
23. ↑ **Anatolia:** Denotes the westernmost protrusion of Asia, comprising the majority of the Republic of Turkey
24. ↑ Orochi is a legendary 8-headed and 8-tailed Japanese dragon that was slain by the Shinto storm-god Susanoo.
25. ↑ Minamoto no Yoshitsune (1159 – June 15, 1189) was a general of the Minamoto clan of Japan in the late Heian and early Kamakura period. He is considered one of the greatest and the most popular warriors of his era, and one of the most famous samurai fighters in the history of Japan.
26. ↑ In Medieval Jewish, Christian and Islamic legends, the Seal of Solomon was a magical signet ring said to have been possessed by King Solomon, which variously gave him the power to command demons, genies, or to speak with animals .
27. ↑ Ahura Mazda is described as the highest deity of worship in Zoroastrianism, along with being the first and most frequently invoked deity in the Yasna. The word Ahura means light and Mazda means wisdom. Thus Ahura Mazda is the lord of light and wisdom.
28. ↑ Mithra is the Zoroastrian divinity (yazata) of covenant and oath. In addition to being the divinity of contracts, Mithra is also a judicial figure, an all-seeing protector of Truth, and the guardian of cattle, the harvest and of The Waters.

29. ↑ Zeus is the child of Cronus and Rhea, and the youngest of his siblings. In most traditions he is married to Hera. He is the god of sky and thunder in Greek mythology. His Roman counterpart is Jupiter, Hindu counterpart is Indra and Etruscan counterpart is Tinia.
30. ↑ "Fun'ya no Yasuhide"(文) from the *Ogura Hyakunin Isshu*(小), a classical Japanese anthology of one hundred Japanese waka poems by one hundred poets.[10]
31. ↑ Sól is the Sun personified in Germanic mythology. In both the Poetic Edda and the Prose Edda she is described as the sister of the personified moon, Máni, is the daughter of Mundilfari, is at times referred to as Álfröðull, and is foretold to be killed by a monstrous wolf during the events of Ragnarök, though beforehand she will have given birth to a daughter who continues her mother's course through the heavens. In the Prose Edda, she is additionally described as the wife of Glenr. As a proper noun, Sól appears throughout Old Norse literature.
32. ↑ The 117-metre (384 ft) tall Diamond and Flower Ferris Wheel opened at the park in 2001. On a clear day, it affords views of Tokyo Bay, Chiba, Edogawa, Tokyo Disneyland, and Mount Fuji.